

GamerZines

ISSUE 13 | FEBRUARY 2014

# FirstLook

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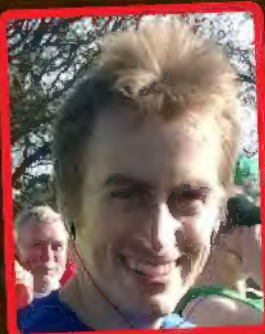


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**5**



# WELCOME TO FirstLook



**W**ooo, our first issue of 2014 and boy, is it a doozy! Not only do we hear from Creative Assembly about how they plan on reclaiming the good name of xenomorphs everywhere in their survival scare-'em-up *Alien: Isolation*,

but we also talk to the eSports Global Network about how they plan on unifying competitive gaming across the planet. Additionally ArenaNet also share with us their plans for *Guild Wars 2*'s epic *Living Story: Season 1* finale. We won't share any spoilers we promise, but a word to the wise: you should go back to Tyria for the next month or so.

Along with all that goodness we also have previews of two of the biggest releases of the year, *The Elder Scrolls Online* and *Titanfall*, and we look at what some would call 'sleeper hits' that might just surprise you. Oh and if you're wondering, yes we did have to extend that editor shot above to contain my wind-enhanced plumage. Ladies and gentlemen, you are welcome.

Enjoy the issue.

**Andy Griffiths, Editor**  
[FIRSTLOOK@gamerzines.com](mailto:FIRSTLOOK@gamerzines.com)

## MEET THE TEAM

Still pondering  
gaming's  
illustrious future...



**Michael Afifi**  
Wants his identity kept secret.

**Don't miss!**  
*This month's  
top highlights!*



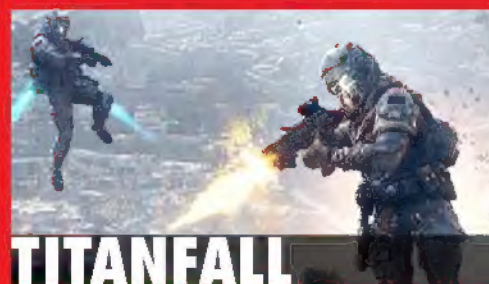
**WARGAME RED  
DRAGON**



**SHERLOCK HOLMES:  
CRIMES &  
PUNISHMENT**



**THE ELDER  
SCROLLS ONLINE**



**TITANFALL**

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## INTERVIEW: ALIEN: ISOLATION



## WHY NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO RETURN TO GUILD WARS 2

# DON'T MISS NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE!

Did you know that a new issue of FirstLook is released every month, and by subscribing you'll be one of the first to read it?

## QUICK FINDER



*Styx: Master of Shadows*  
*Alien: Isolation*  
*The Elder Scrolls Online*  
*Dark Souls II*  
*Wargame Red Dragon*  
*Guild Wars 2*  
*PreOrder*  
*Must Haves*  
*Video Round-up*

*Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2*  
*Titanfall*  
*Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments*  
*eSports Global Network*  
*DLC & UGC Round-up*

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**FirstLook** |









**PREVIEW**

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# STYX: MASTER OF SHADOWS

PUB: FOCUS HOME  
INTERACTIVE  
DEV: CYANIDE  
STUDIOS  
PLATFORM: PC  
ETA: SUMMER 2014

## THE SMARTEST ORC AROUND

**F**antasy RPGs are now two-a-penny as developers scramble to steal attention away from franchises like *Dragon Age* and *The Elder Scrolls*. *Of Orcs and Men* was one such game, and despite boasting the really great premise of downtrodden Orcs looking to overthrow their human masters, with help from a stealth master named Styx (subtext alert), the game wasn't quite all that it could've been, thanks to sloppy voiceacting and repetitive combat.

*Master of Shadows* is the spin-off/successor to that game, and replaces all the RPG guff with finely balanced stealth

gameplay. Across eight different missions, lasting around 90 minutes each, players will control Styx as he attempts to steal the precious magical resource known as amber away from Inquisition forces by scaling the Tower of Arkenesh. Elves, humans and other Orcs will get in his way, but thankfully he has a bunch of tricks to avoid their alerting gaze, including unparalleled agility and the ability to clone himself.

Expect tall, multi-laned, expansive environments which offer meaningful choice while allowing exploration. In other words, this is another contender for *Thief's* vacant throne. ■





 XBOX ONE

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GAMES**

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The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt  
Elder Scrolls Online  
Call of Duty®: Ghosts  
NBA 2K14  
Madden 25  
FIFA 14  
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Tom Clancy's The Division

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MOMENTS

PREVIEW

# CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW 2

PUB: KONAMI  
DEV: MERCURYSTEAM  
PLATFORM: PC  
XBOX 360  
PLAYSTATION 3  
ETA: 28TH FEBRUARY

TRAIN  
OF  
MON

SOMETHING FOR MUSIC LOVERS

**B**ehind the scenes trailers are par for the course when promoting big budget games, but we were surprised when Konami released one purely showcasing the soundtrack for *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2*. Oscar Araujo returns to the series after his epic work on the first game and it sounds like he's putting together a very sombre yet theatrical track. This isn't entirely surprising when you consider that the plot of *Lords of Shadow 2* features Gabriel Belmont waking up in the modern day, marooned from the time he once knew – albeit with all the abilities of Dracula.

If you read our previous issue containing the excellent article, 'The Inevitable Rise of the Video Game Composer' you'll know that evangelising game scores is something we never shy away from, and we believe that Konami deserve massive credit for releasing a trailer that purely focuses on this sequel's OST (original soundtrack) with no gameplay and few story details.

Allowing a soundtrack to speak for itself takes guts, and while *Lords of Shadow 2* wasn't on our radars before, this trailer has certainly changed that. Trust us, give it a listen. You won't regret it. ■



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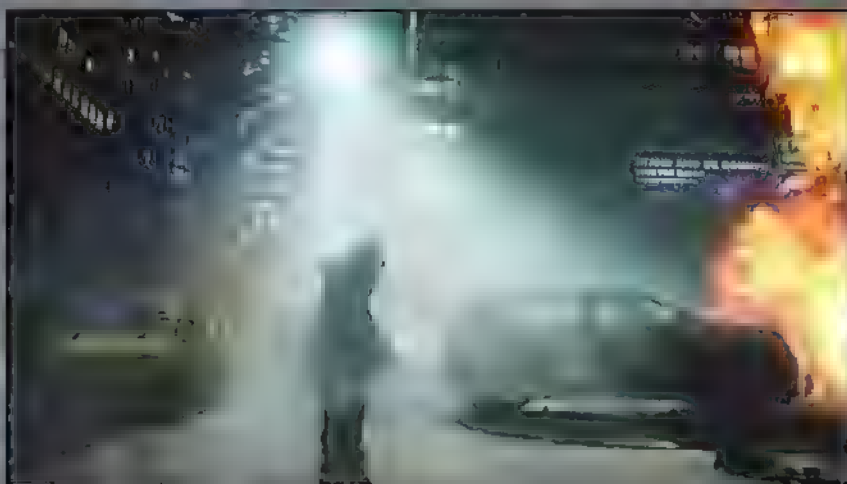
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## THE NEXT GENERATION OF ACTION-ADVENTURE GAMING

## Diablo III: Reaper of Souls

A collector's edition to die for!

**T**here's a good reason why Blizzard collector's editions hold their value even after you open them, and that reason is consistency. Every Blizzard release that's received a premium edition, starting with *World of Warcraft* in 2004, has contained the regular staples of exclusive in-game profile items for Battle.net, a making-of DVD/BluRay, soundtrack CD, art book and some random commemorative extras, all housed in a big

uniquely coloured box measuring 10 x 3.9 x 11.8 inches.

These sets are meant to sit on your shelf until the end of time, creating a wall of Blizzard awesomeness which is meant to wow anyone that happens to come across your collection. The *Reapers of Souls* collector's edition isn't any different, which is why we suspect this box set will be prized as highly as its forebears. Go grab one before they inevitably sell out.



PUB: ACTIVISION  
BLIZZARD  
DEV: BLIZZARD  
PLAT: PC  
ETA: 25TH MARCH

## South Park: The Stick of Truth

PUB: UB SOFT  
DEV: OBSIDIAN ENT  
PLAT: XBOX 360, PS3 PC  
ETA: 7TH MARCH



**T**he opportunity to finally play Matt Stone and Trey Parker's Obsidian-developed retro-RPG is just a few weeks away now, and it feels like we've been waiting to type that for years. We have

no doubts that *Stick of Truth* will be hilarious, but we do wonder if it'll actually be fun to play. JRPG-styled combat has never held much favour with us, after all. We'll put this release through our review ringer next month.

## Thief

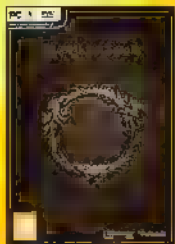
PUB: SQUARE ENIX  
DEV: EIDOS MONTREAL  
PLAT: PS3, XBOX 360 PC XBOX ONE, PS4  
ETA: 28TH FEBRUARY

**E**idos Montreal's first full console and PC release since the excellent *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (2011) isn't shaping up too hot if you take recent previews as gospel.

Summed up as '*Dishonored-lite*' by many, we really hope this reinvention of *Thief* is better received by fans when it launches this February. Garrett deserves better...







# The Elder Scrolls Online

PUB: BETHESDA  
DEV: ZENIMAX ONLINE STUDIOS  
PLAT: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE  
ETA: 4TH APRIL (PC), JUNE (CONSOLES)

**T**he first massively multiplayer *Elder Scrolls* game is also the first genuine y new MMO to be released for next-gen consoles, and it's shaping up well. As you'd

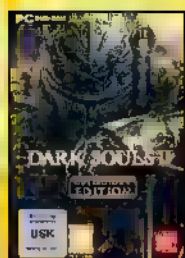
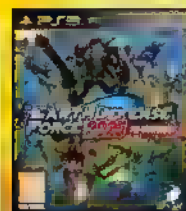
expect such an occasion deserves commemoration, and that's exactly what the Imperial Edition (£89.99) offers with five days early access, a 20cm Molag Bol statue, and artbook.

PUB: D3  
DEV: SANDLOT  
PLAT: PS3, XBOX 360  
ETA: 21ST FEBRUARY

# Earth Defense Force 2025

**O**ur guiltiest of guilty pleasures, *EDF 2017* stole way too much of our time at university and we hope *2025* can rekindle that obsession. Original Japanese

developers Sandlot are on the series for this sequel and their work looks just as chaotic, fun and destructive as before. Forget about *Insect Armageddon*, this is the real deal!



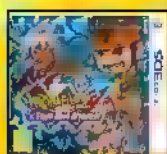
# Dark Souls II

PUB: NAMCO BANDA  
DEV: FROM SOFTWARE  
PLAT: PS3 PC XBOX 360  
ETA: 14TH MARCH

**N**amco Bandai's efforts to make *Dark Souls II* a mainstream phenomenon have seemingly already succeeded, with the game's collector's edition selling

out everywhere in the UK. From Software may be making some concessions with their sequel, but it still remains the toughest challenge a gamer can face.

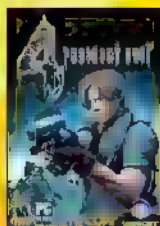
# Inazuma Eleven 3: TOA



PUB: NINTENDO  
DEV: LEVEL-5  
PLAT: 3DS  
ETA: 14TH FEBRUARY

**O**kay, so the name of this game sounds like a weightlifting supplement, but don't let that put you off. *IE 3: Team Ogre Attacks* is an odd blend of JRPG mixed with *Sensible Soccer* and that gameplay mix is as additive as you'd expect. This series is the perfect tool for teaching little ones the offside rule, with a dollop of anime madness.

# Resident Evil 4



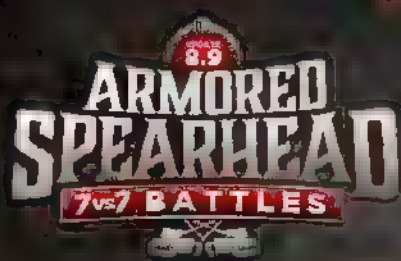
PUB: CAPCOM  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
PLAT: PC  
ETA: FEBRUARY

**C**apcom are bringing *Resident Evil 4* to the PC yet again, with new HD visuals, digital archive and soundtrack CD. If you're one of the seven people out there who haven't played this sequel on the Wii, Gamecube, PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Zeebo, PC or iOS before then you should probably pick it up.



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## MCKELLAN AND NAPPER ALIEN: ISOLATION INTERVIEW

PUB: SEGA  
DEV: The Creative Assembly  
PREVIOUS GAME: Total War: Rome II  
PLATFORMS: PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3  
ETA: 2014

### BIO



Jon McKellan (left) is the lead UI and Art Designer for *Alien: Isolation*, while Gary Napper (right) is

project. Both are two of the biggest fans of *Alien*

*Creative Assembly reveal their plans to make*

**F**orget about the travesty that was *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, *Alien: Isolation* is the real deal.

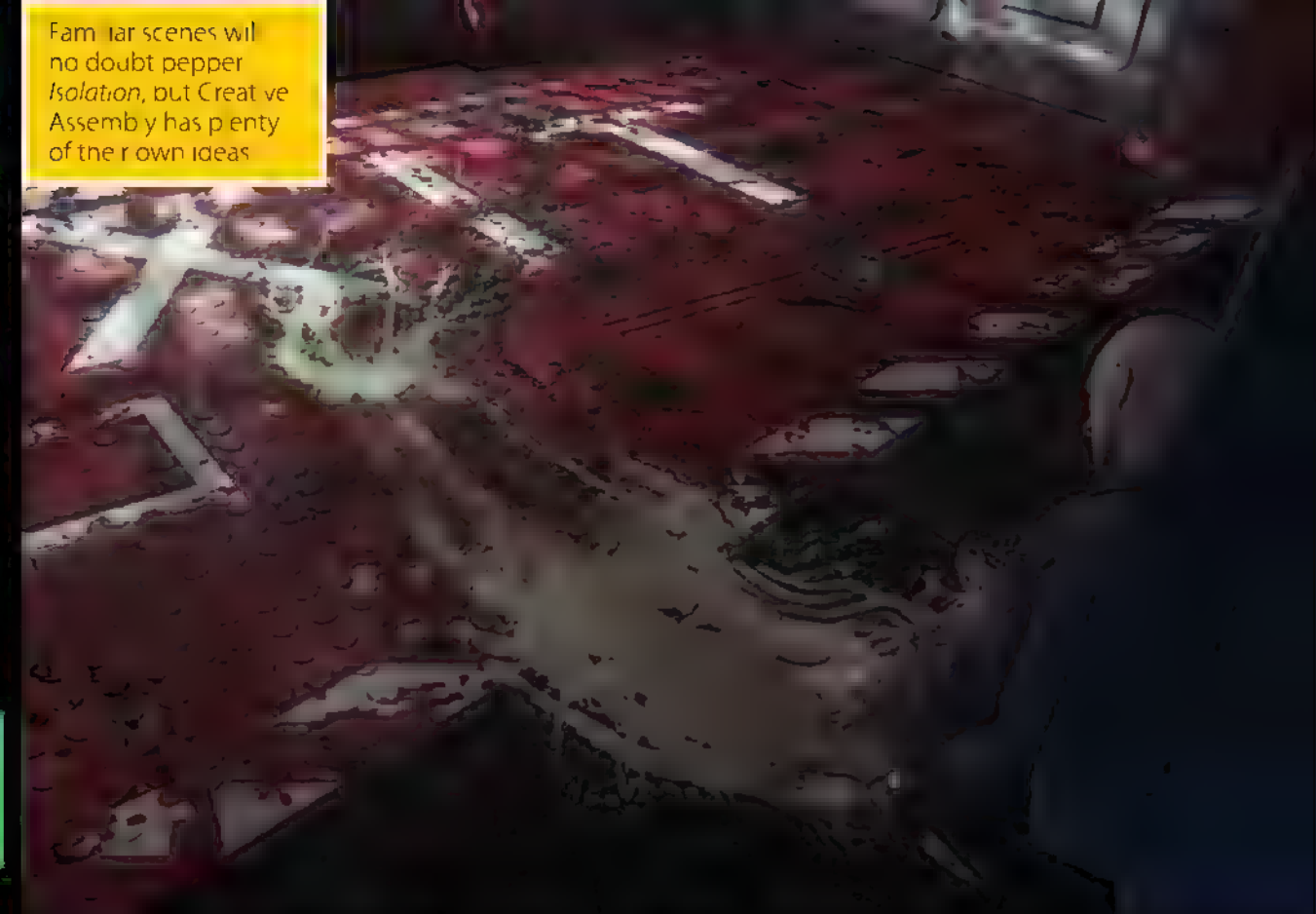
That's the big takeaway from our hour-long chat with the game's lead UI and Art Designer Jon McKellan and Lead Designer, Gary Napper. Both know the *Alien* franchise inside out and they're a big part of an ambitious project down in West Sussex to give the xenomorph its teeth back. They want to make gamers afraid of Giger's creation again, and judging from their passion and insight they certainly seem on the right track. During our conversation we quizzed them on

everything from their sleek antagonist's procedural AI to the game's spooky space station setting, and these are the transcribed highlights of the conversation. Take it away fellas...

Giving the alien procedural AI is a really brave decision, and doing that seems a big advancement on what's been done with this character in other games. Why did you adopt that strategy rather than the moment-to-moment scripted approach?

**GN:** I'm a massive fan of games where the AI is unpredictable and you can play levels again and again. I love the original *Rainbow Six*.





Familiar scenes will no doubt pepper *Isolation*, but Creative Assembly has plenty of their own ideas

## The Giger's xenomorph scary again...

games, where you could just open up a map, select the number of enemies you fight and play against them. I love the fact that you could play levels again and again and have a different experience each time.

When we started crafting the alien, as soon as you had that first jump scare out of that cupboard and played it again, it had lost its replayability and scare factor. I don't know if that was partially us playing it again and again and getting bored by it, but it just became something much more interesting if you went into this area and you didn't know where the alien was going to be, or you didn't have

level designers saying it's going to come through this door and run through this path. By creating an alien that's based on senses and detecting player's movement, we can just drop it in the level and see what it does.

**JM:** You want to feel like you're being hunted, and once you've seen a scripted event which happens the same every time the alien has a disadvantage as you understand how it's programmed. Whereas, if it doesn't react like that, he's always got the upper hand; he always has more knowledge of a situation than you, which keeps the fear there. This is a hardcore game and you can die





The motion tracker isn't the only tool separating you from instant evscream on

quite frequently. You can't just restart and know what he's going to do.

**The timeframe is interesting for *Isolation* as well, with the game set 15 years after *Alien* and 42 years before *Aliens*. Does that give you scope to incorporate different tech from what was seen on the *Nostromo*?**

**GN:** We definitely used the first film as a base to expand from. We really wanted to focus on that one alien experience and that one character in the world, so we took that as a base and thought what could we build around that?

From a story perspective we asked the question: when the *Nostromo* went missing who would go looking for it? And that took us to Amanda Ripley (daughter of Ellen) and when that was pitched to Fox they were really happy with that idea, and I personally think that was because we were recreating the situation from the first film. That isn't to say we're limited to that, we are

expanding in certain areas and we have a really interesting story with it.

**JM:** The station that you're on is in the process of being decommissioned, so in order for that to happen it needs to have been around for a while. It's a little bit of a grey area, because 15 years seems like a long time, but in terms of technology and what would be required to build one of these stations, they wouldn't be churned out every year. These things are built to last a long time. All of our designs are grounded in the film but we can expand on that or improve on certain areas where it feels believable to do so.

**So you aren't retconning anything *Prometheus*-style?**

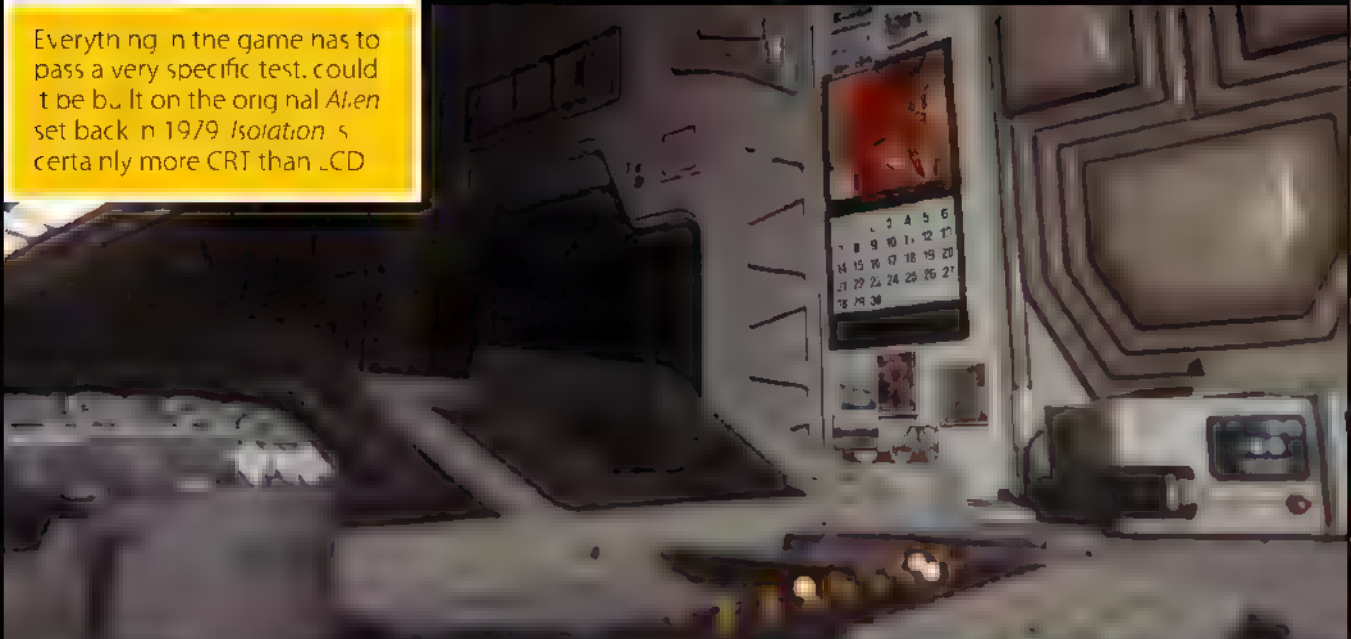
**BOTH:** No, no, no! (laughs).

**How do you go about building a campaign-length experience around that one person, one alien challenge?**

**GN:** That's a question we've been asked a lot and I think it's down



Everything in the game has to pass a very specific test: could it be built on the original *Alien* set back in 1979? *Isolation* is certainly more CRT than LCD.



To how we chose to first show our game. We chose to show the distilled *Alien* experience. We didn't give you any kind of weaponry or defensive measures, we just put you in an area with the alien and said this is what we've built the game around. Naturally, from that people have said that's amazing, but wondered, how does that last 15 hours? Well, that isn't everything we've done (laughs)! There are other threats aboard the station and obviously there's story to build it along, and there are a lot of mechanics the player can find. That gives us enough to string it out and build an experience which is 12-15 hours long, so it isn't a concern that we have.

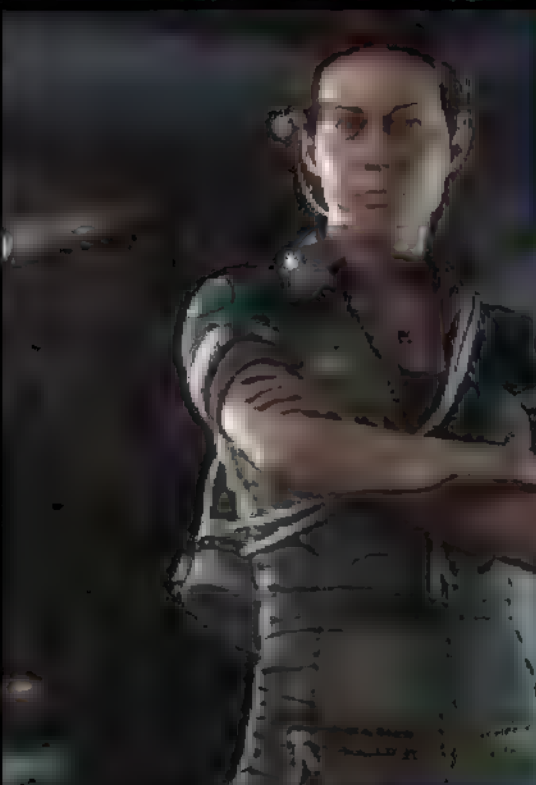
**That's the problem in some ways though, as people don't buy an *Alien* game to fight androids they buy it to fight xenomorphs...**

**GN:** That's interesting, because like you say nobody wants to fight androids in an *Alien* game, ➤

“

**From a story perspective we asked the question: when the *Nostromo* went missing who would go looking for it?**

”



Amanda Ripley certainly looks as though she takes after her mother. We wonder, will her dad will make an appearance?

## INTERVIEW



but technically that's exactly what happened in the first film. Ash went mental and tried to kill everyone. You wouldn't say Ripley fought him but she managed to defend herself a little, and that's a lot closer to what we're looking at. There are other threats on the station, but we're certainly not on the level of giving people machine guns and rocket launchers to fight through.

**JM:** Weyland Yutani mechs...

**GN:** ...or clones and soldiers, but there are other threats to worry about. It's been really interesting as a designer to set these scenarios for players to interact with, and their first worry isn't how to solve the problem but how the situation relates to the alien. If you go in there and make too much noise or do something strange, the alien comes in and changes everything.

**So do androids in this timeframe have behavioural**

**inhibitors? As obviously that's the reason why the Ash synthetic was a bit 'twitchy' in *Alien versus the Bishop* model in *Aliens*.**

**GN:** Our androids are created by a company of our own creation called Seegson, so they aren't Weyland Yutani spec. The fiction behind it is that Seegson don't want to recreate humans, they want you to know who are androids and who are not. It's obvious in the game who is and who isn't [an android]. We don't have to abide by that strict Weyland Yutani definition.


**The only space station we've seen in the *Alien* universe is...**

**GN:** Gateway Station [from the beginning of *Aliens*].

**Yeah, so how does this one [Sevastopol station] differ from that one?**

**GN:** I really love the concept





Creative Assembly want gamers to be afraid of the xenomorph form once again

the writers came up with for Sevastopol. You know when a company builds a big block of flats, a shopping centre or a big business hub and they think all these companies will move in and it'll be the centre and, for whatever reason – economic viability or whatever – it just falls apart. That's what this station is. It's something that has been built out in the far reaches of space as a centre for business and trade and it doesn't go so well. Few companies move in and people go in there and end up not leaving. It's a bit like an old shopping centre where all the big businesses have moved out of town. It's in its last stages of operation, and gives us a really nice point in the universe where we can say: yeah, in this whole world of Weyland Yutani and big business there are companies that fail and here is one of them. It just happens to be where the black box for the Nostromo has been handed in.

**JM:** Because Amanda is a Weyland Yutani employee and she's going

## “What happens when a company tries to be Weyland Yutani and fails?”

to pick up the black box, it made more sense for her to not go to a Weyland Yutani station, so it gave us an opportunity to create something a bit different from what we usually see.

Pretty much every human structure in the *Alien* franchise has been Weyland Yutani operated in some way, and now we can do something that answers the question: what happens when a company tries to be Weyland Yutani and fails? There's something interesting there and we can put a character behind the world rather than the faceless corporate identity of Weyland Yutani where you don't get to see behind closed doors. We can do something that's a bit more exposed, and this failed corporation is perfect for that.

# INTERVIEW



We suspect *Isolation* will feature its fair share of environment-based puzzles

**Sevastopol station seems massive, too.**

**GN:** Well, in the fiction it was designed for 5,000 people. It's supposed to be a huge business hub with hospital areas and habitation areas, but actually by the time you arrive there are only 500 people living there.

**JM:** And that population is in decline... for whatever reason (laughs). It [the station] is also in the process of being stripped down for parts and has areas which instead of being half-built are being taken apart. It isn't just a dilapidated wasteland that you're used to seeing, it's a bit more structured than that.

**So the station sits between *Alien's* Nostromo and *Alien III's* prison planet?**

**Both:** Yeah, somewhere in between.

**Having 500 people on the station must give you a lot of**

**scope from a story perspective?**

**GN:** Yeah, it gives us a nice opportunity to add some backstories and little places to explore. Putting across the human side of the station is a really interesting avenue to go down.

**JM:** It's quite common for games, and films as well, to visit the location after the aftermath – you go to the burned-out cities of *Fallout* or *BioShock's* Rapture after the fact.

We're going to this station as events are in progress. As this alien is causing chaos on this station you're there, the people are there. You're dropped right into the middle of it, rather than arriving at this haunted house and asking what happened? That gives us a lot of scope to keep players on their toes and keep them interested. It isn't just empty room after empty room as there are things happening here.

**Will this be a functioning society with schools, shops and**





## REVEAL TRAILER

the like?

**GN:** Hmmm, I'm not sure we can answer that without giving too many things away.

**JM:** It's more of a trading post, than a city as such.

**Surely there will be ginger cats living there though, right?**

**GN:** Oh, thousands!

**JM:** There's 500. It turns out the citizen population is really just all cats! (laughs) It's really just a big cattery!

**Choosing Ellen Ripley's daughter Amanda as the protagonist is an interesting choice and adds strength to the long-held fan theory that the destiny of the xenomorph species and Ripley are intertwined by fate. Is that a theory shared by you guys?**

**GN:** There's a split opinion on that because some people are angry that we've touched on Ripley, but

“

*[In reference to Amanda Ripley]*  
**What would happen if we had no character connected to the first film? The instant feedback would be, so who are these people?**”

”


it's set 15 years after the first film.

For me, it was the opposite though, like what would happen if we had no character connected to the first film? The instant feedback would be, so who are these people?

**JM:** Yeah, why should we care?

**GN:** We always knew it was going to be a female protagonist. From the very first white boxes we were doing our character was a female crash dummy. We always knew it was going to be the case, just tying Ellen Ripley to it seemed like the

# INTERVIEW

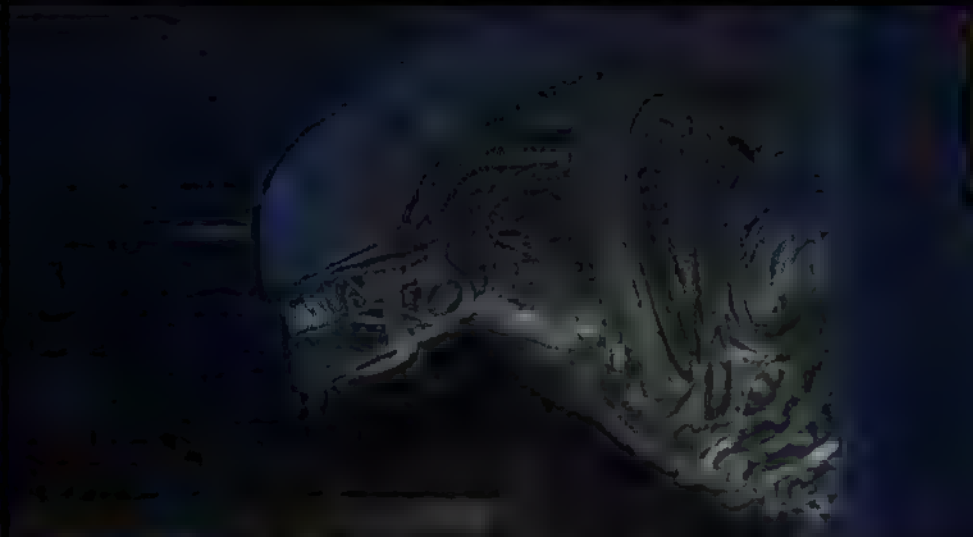


most natural thing to do. You know in *Jaws* you always have the same family that deals with the shark, and people say the same thing with Ripley.

**JM:** Al [Hope, Creative Director] put it best when he said he wanted to tie our game into the first movie. We didn't want to remake the story of the first film, but we want to answer the question: when the Nostromo goes missing who would go out there and look for

it? We could have had Weyland Yutani mercs going to look for her or whatever, but we wanted somebody who had an emotional attachment to look for her, not be forced to look for her.

As a player, if you're just sent in to go find out what happened to the Nostromo and you're just a business exec with no personal connection, then it's a little bit of a hollow journey – you're not really invested in it. Whereas you're Amanda Ripley,



This xenomorph appears to follow the commonly accepted *Aliens* form, rather than the man-in-suit variety from the first



Sevastopol station is home to over 500 civilians, offering CA more scope to tell human tales in the survival horror game



having the motivation of searching for her mum who went missing when she was just 11. I would want to find out what happened to my mum if that happened to me. There's a real thing there that people can perhaps not relate to, but understand. It gives us a nice link with the story. We don't need to retconn anything, it's standalone and does its own thing while still feeling connected. And yeah we can still keep in with the Ripley's

**“You’re Amanda Ripley, searching for her mum who went missing when she was just 11. I would want to find out what happened to my mum if that happened to me”**

**Do you have any scope to put any new spin on the story of the Nostromo?**

**GN:** There are areas of the game where we explore fiction around it, but that's right where the NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement) stops, I think (laughs).

**JM:** We're being very careful not to change anything with the first movie. We don't want to mess with the first movie and change the context of everything. We do want

to find out as much as we can, though. Amanda's journey is her finding out what happened to her mother, but we aren't trying to change that film or explain events in a different way. We want to keep that pure and do our own thing.

**Thanks for your time guys! Alien: Isolation will be released for PC and consoles towards the end of 2014.**

PREVIEW



# TITANFALL

EXCLUSIVE  
SCREENSHOTS

Beta Hands-On



PUB: EA  
DEV: Respawn Entertainment  
RELEASE: Q3 2014  
LAST GAME: Titanfall  
PLATFORM: PC, Xbox One  
GENRE: FPS  
ETA: 10-15 minutes

*Less players doesn't have to equal less fun*

If we were Respawn Entertainment we would be thoroughly miffed that thousands of gamers out there have judged our debut effort on map size and player count alone.

The terrifyingly obvious truth is not every game needs to be *Battlefield* in order to offer a compelling multiplayer experience. Hell, some of our best ever competitive battles have involved 1 versus 1, 2 versus 2 or 8 versus 8 match types in *Mechwarrior 4*, *X-Wing versus Tie-Fighter*, or the grand emperor of all


multiplayer shooters, *Counterstrike: Source*.

*Titanfall's* maximum 6 versus 6 player cap may look slight, but when you actually get into a match everything feels thoroughly epic and fluid. At Gamescom last August we sampled two matches of *Titanfall's* Attrition mode (see *FirstLook* Issue 9) and during the latest hands-on we had a big enough slot to take our time with the game, gaining early access to the multiplayer beta - set to open up to the public soon.

Our day started with a dozen

FirstLook | Preview





"Betas are traditionally all about server stress testing, data gathering and gameplay balancing, but *Titanfall*'s is surprisingly generous."

SIVE  
ENS

or so short tutorials which showcased *Titanfall*'s *Brink*-inspired freeform movement system – allowing players to wall-run, vault over cover and double-jump via a handy back-mounted rocket pack – and the basics of utilising the game's futuristic weaponry, including Smart Pistol (eat your heart out *Colonial Marines*) and of course the titular mechs.

Following the traditions of the mech-series *Gundam*, the tutorial consists of multiple VR (Virtual Reality) challenges, all of which take place in the comfort of your

Hammond Industries robot en route to a planet which looks a lot like Earth. That's pretty much where the story details end for the beta, with little explanation of why the battle you're about to be a part of is important, or what the beef is between the two factions (IMC versus Militia), but that isn't really surprising.

Betas are traditionally all about server stress testing, data gathering and gameplay balancing, but *Titanfall*'s is surprisingly generous, packing in two different maps and three

# PREVIEW

## PILOT LOADOUTS

ASSASSIN

COB

CUSTOM PILOT 1

CUSTOM PILOT 2

CUSTOM PILOT 3



### PRIMARY WEAPON



R-101C CARBINE

FULL AUTO ASSAULT WEAPON

HCOG

FACTORY ISSUE

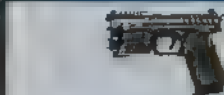
### ANTI-TITAN WEAPON



ARCHER HEAVY ROCKET

FIRE A POWERFUL HOMING ROCKET

### SIDEARM



HAMMOND P2011

PRECISION SEMI-AUTO PISTOL

### TACTICAL ABILITY



CLOAK

MOST EFFECTIVE AGAINST TITANS

### DRONANCE



FRAG GRENADE

EXPLOSIVE ANTI-PERSONNEL WEAPON



EXPLOSIVES PACK

CO-OPERATIVE SUPPORT WEAPON



DOME SHIELD BATTERY

TITANFALL DOMES SHIELD LASTS LONGER

TITANFALL

different game modes: Last Mech Standing, Attrition and Hardpoint Domination. The first game type we mentioned features a team spawning into a map already inside their respective titan, with the team associated with the last mech standing winning the match. Attrition is team deathmatch under another name and Hardpoint Domination involves teams battling to control three points on a map earning tickets towards a predetermined win tally. None of these modes are necessarily unique unto themselves, but novelty match types aren't really necessary for *Titanfall* as its moment-to-moment gameplay is already so different to any other shooter out there.

So what makes this game so different? One word, titans. These massive metallic juggernauts are available to every player

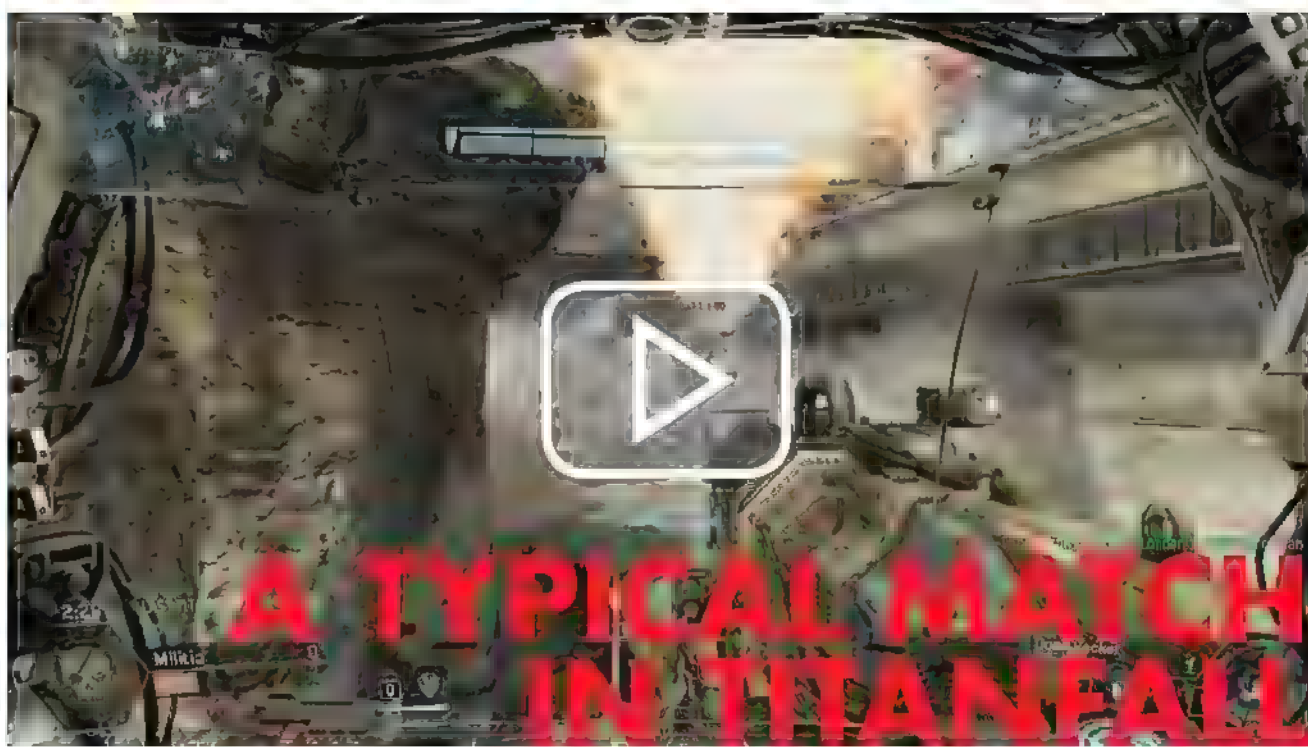
in a match, at a moment and location of their choosing. Players only need to wait around three minutes for the titanfall ability to charge, then they can spawn their bot in, with a press of the 'V' key.

Once the mech rockets down on cue, players have the choice of either jumping inside and utilising the customisable weaponry (artillery cannons, rocket launcher or giant rifle) for themselves, or setting the mech to auto-pilot where it'll either follow the player or guard a location of their choosing.

Mechs and vulnerable humans occupy the same space on maps, with the former proving powerful and sturdy, while the latter is sneaky yet equally as destructive. Against the odds, Respawn has actually balanced these two seemingly irreconcilable foes, by giving each specific advantages in specific situations. For example, if

2:21





## A TYPICAL MATCH IN TITANFALL

you're in a titan and you're located between 10 to 20 feet from a human soldier, you can waste them without a second thought, but if they are within that 10 foot range they can take you out fairly easily by getting up high, jumping down onto the roof of your mech.

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*"Titans can also  
melee each  
other to death, only  
via their hulking  
metallic fists"*

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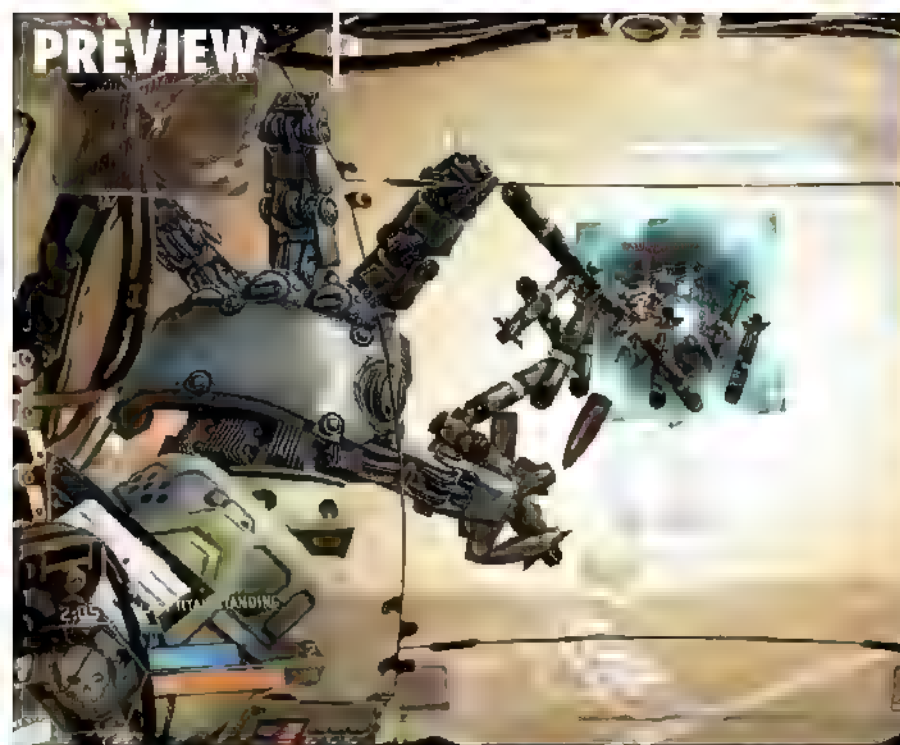
shooting off the cover protecting the nuclear reactor power source (every suit has one) and keep shooting away until a meltdown is triggered. Those caught out of their mech can also fire their anti-mech ordinance to take out those pesky robot dwellers from range, but we found this

extremely difficult with the default weaponry. Oh and there's also the handy trick of on foot players activating their standard issue cloaking device to hide from would-be murderers.

It's these options which make *Titanfall* as exciting as it is, and when the battle involves two, three, four or eight titans facing off against one another it's easy to get carried away in the ensuing carnage. Better yet there's also the ability to capture bullets and ordinance fired in your direction via every mech's onboard Vortex Shield, which offers both protection and an additional attack option by catching ordinance flung at your mech, suspending it in the air and flinging it back to the would-be aggressor. This ability needs to be charged before use so careful timing is needed, as it only lasts a handful of seconds on full charge ➤



# PREVIEW



Battles were punctuated with moments when somebody would activate a vortex shield, catch bullets/missiles aimed at them and throw them back at the source. Really skillful players would anticipate this however, leave a slither of shield charge, and reposition back at the would-be repeller. Get it? Good.



When you kill other players or AI grunts, you earn points less your Titan spawn meter by seconds at a time.

It's skewed a little by that. The final game will feature at least 3 different designs, but from what we played these robots have more in common with BattleTech mechs than the lightning fast, agile suits of Gundam and that's fine as it ensures a level playing field. While walking around in hulking suits you feel empowered as tiny humans scurry around at your knees, but after a few matches it becomes apparent just how vulnerable mechs can be.

Titans can also melee each other to death, only via their hulking metallic fists, and this feels as clunky as you can imagine. All titans can activate their boosters in short bursts to quickly sidestep forward or backward and left to right, but this too is limited to a three-bar charge, and that still doesn't make them feel agile. However we only sampled the Atlas titan variant so our opinion

In addition to other players in matches, there are also AI bots (the simulated human kind, not the mech variety) for each faction and killing these dumb enemies does add to your points tally. Occasionally they do something to imbue some kind of intelligence, like scream out the name of a recently deceased friend or even drag a fallen ally to safety, but really they seem to exist





A titan only has to fire at you for a second to kill you when on foot. To avoid this unwanted attention, use the cloak device - charge permitting.

just to give players something else to shoot at and rarely, if ever, actually take down human players. These AI soldiers are a means of bolstering the maps with activity and in that manner they work fairly well. Occasionally heavily armoured variants of these soldiers, dubbed Spectres, appear

*"These robots definitely have more in common with BattleTech mechs than the lightning fast, agile suits of Gundam"*

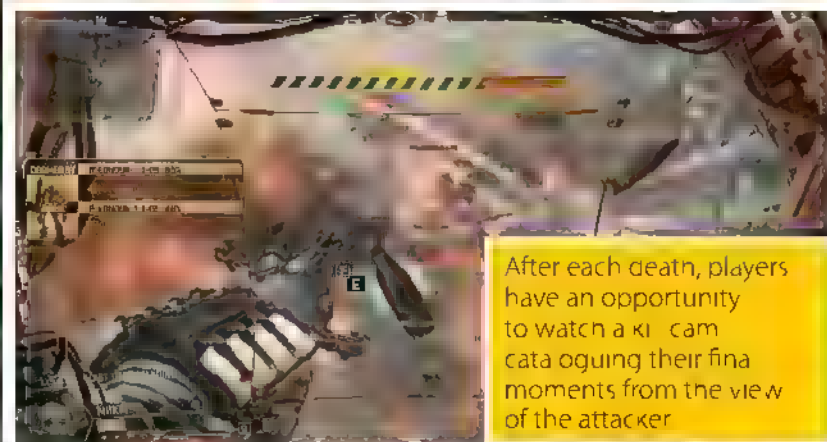
to offer a sterner challenge, but overall these AI lackeys seem superfluous to the action. Yes they are meant to simulate that epic battlefield flavour, but when you see them clustering around capture points just waiting to be

shot the illusion of intelligence is resolutely shattered.

The two maps sampled, Angel City and Fracture, felt varied enough and despite one being set in an urban centre and the other less built-up countryside, battles between players still stayed within that 0-20 feet away sweet spot. Outside of that range mech combat involved taking pot shots at far away enemies before they'd retreat to allow their shield to recharge. We did witness a clever 'Rope a Dope' moment when an enemy, after shooting at us from a 100 or so feet away, retreated and sent their mech into automode towards us with the goal of making us think they were finally charging us down, allowing them to get up close on foot and mount our mighty metallic hide for an easy takedown. That plan was foiled though, because as soon as the unwelcome visitor



In Last Titan Standing mode, it's all about sticking together and working as a team. Other game modes are more suitable for the lone wolf types.



After each death, players have an opportunity to watch a kill cam cataloging their final moments from the view of the attacker.

I jumped aboard our mech, a siren sounded alerting us to the unwanted incursion advising us to leave the vehicle so we could take them out, but instead we simply told a teammate next to us to shoot our mech eliminating the would-be saboteur in a few shots.

*Titanfall* is a game rife with these kinds of epic moments but its sci-fi motifs make those events seem more unique than a traditional military shooter, even though Respawn has borrowed from that genre a lot. At the end of either Attrition or Hardpoint Domination matches an additional objective kicks in involving the losing team racing to an evac-dropship before a timer runs out while the winning team has to take them out. This concluding event doesn't necessarily need to be there but it offers a chance for even the losing team to feel as though





## BURN CARDS

Kill Respawns a good time to select your next BurnCard.

STARTING IN  
30

UNLOCKED  
AT LEVEL 9

UNLOCKED  
AT LEVEL 11

Burn cards drop randomly during battles, with only three able to be taken into a match, level permitting.

AGGRESSIVE ACTION

PROSTHETIC LEGS

Faster Pilot movement speed

AMPED M  
LAUNCHER

Replace Anti Titan Weapon with high-capacity, automatic launcher.

TITANFALL

they've accomplished something. This is just one example of Respawn seeing a problem in the competitive multiplayer landscape and fixing it, but one thing they haven't really solved is the character progression arc which once again involves earning XP from match performance, levelling

*"By far the most fun we've had with a console-styled shooter for a very long time"*

up and gaining access to greater forms of weaponry and tech. This system is by far the most familiar aspect of *Titanfall* and it's a shame Respawn hasn't come up with their own solution. Less standard is the card system, which involves buffs tied to one-time-use cards which players choose before they enter battle. These vary

from reducing the mech spawn timer to faster on foot movement but they don't vary up that core progression path which shooter fans will be more than familiar with.

There's lots more to see in *Titanfall* and our couple of hours spent with the beta was by far the most fun we've had with a console-styled shooter for a very long time. On the NVIDIA GeForce 780TI-powered PCs we were hooked up to, it looked and felt absolutely gorgeous to play. There is a bigger question to answer regarding what is actually going on in this new sci-fi universe but for the time being at least consider us very, very impressed. ■

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# THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

EXCLUSIVE  
SCREENSHOTS

Level 1-10 Hands-On



PUB: BETHESDA  
DEV: ZENIMAX ONLINE  
STUDIOS  
LAST GAME: N/A  
PLATFORM: PC (FROM ESO)  
PLAYSTATION 4  
ETA: 4TH APRIL (PC-ONLY),  
JUNE (CONSOLES)

*This is Tamriel alright, but not as you know*

**T**he longer we spend with *The Elder Scrolls Online* the more it becomes apparent the sacrifices Zenimax Online Studios have made in order to fit this previously single-player only series into the established MMORPG template.

Picking features for this game we imagine was a bit like making cookies as a child, or more specifically that moment when you try to make as many cookies as possible from that freshly rolled chocolate chip-laden dough, only to find that no matter how

carefully you place down that star-shape cookie cutter there will always be those slithers of wasted dough on the side.

We'll be the first to admit that this analogy is a bit 'out there', but it's one we can't stop thinking about when we consider our 1-10 level experience with *TESO* as an argonian named 'Lizard Bigbutt'.

The problem is that the Elder Scrolls series in its single-player RPG form is so vast in terms of gameplay and content is that it inevitably means different things to different people, so for instance





ISSIVE  
ENS

it...  
while some will praise *TESO* for its interesting story, varied quest

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*"Skyrim, Oblivion and even Morrowind were prone to game-breaking bugs and progression errors, TESO doesn't have any of that"*

---

design and clichéd yet committed fantasy tone, others will complain

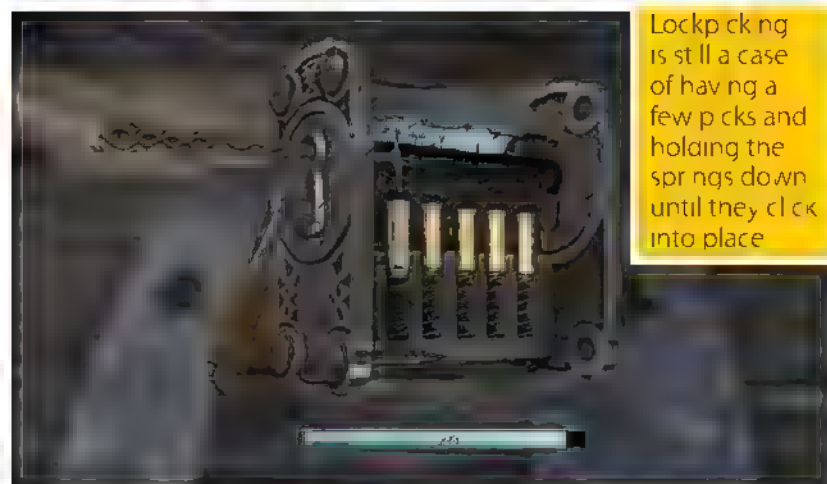
that they can't collect books to place on their own digital shelf inside their own digital house, or that quest-giving NPCs remain stubbornly alive no matter how much their sword slashes at their invulnerable forms.

While *Skyrim*, *Oblivion* and even the almighty *Morrowind* were prone to game-breaking bugs and progression errors, *TESO* doesn't have any of that and while that is undoubtedly an improvement, a bit of this series' random magic has been lost as a result. That isn't to say *TESO* is a bad game by any

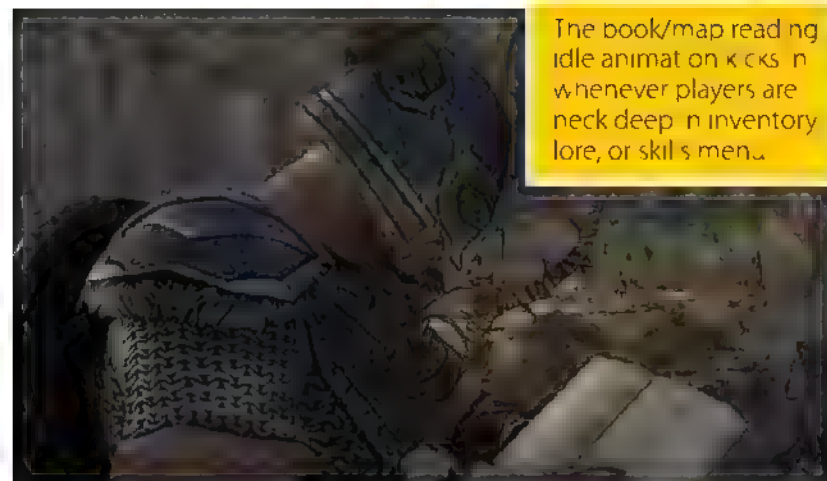
PRE



It isn't wise to upset a netch



Lockpicking is still a case of having a few picks and holding the springs down until they click into place



The book/map reading idle animation kicks in whenever players are neck deep in inventory lore, or skills menu

stretch of the imagination though, it's just a bit different from the Elder Scrolls we all know.

The game starts encouragingly enough, as Zenimax has created the best character creator for an Elder Scrolls game to date offering around fifty different sliders ranging from Eye Depth to Posterior Size ultimately allowing more choices for player expression than you'll know what to do with. Before you get to fiddle with appearance though, you need to select an alliance, race (offers inherent buffs and bonuses) and class (again allocating more buffs and bonuses) for your character.

All of that choice is a bit overwhelming when you roll your first character and the importance of the Alliance system, both as a tool of splitting the playerbase and determining their starter area, isn't communicated well enough for our tastes, but we can imagine





Playing in first person view feels much more natural than third person, but situational awareness is sacrificed somewhat

players easily spending an hour plus, just tinkering around with the look of their character.

Once you've either played around with sliders or hit the 'Randomise Appearance' button you're then flung into a starter area which sees their character

**"Zenimax has created the best character creator for an Elder Scrolls game to date"**

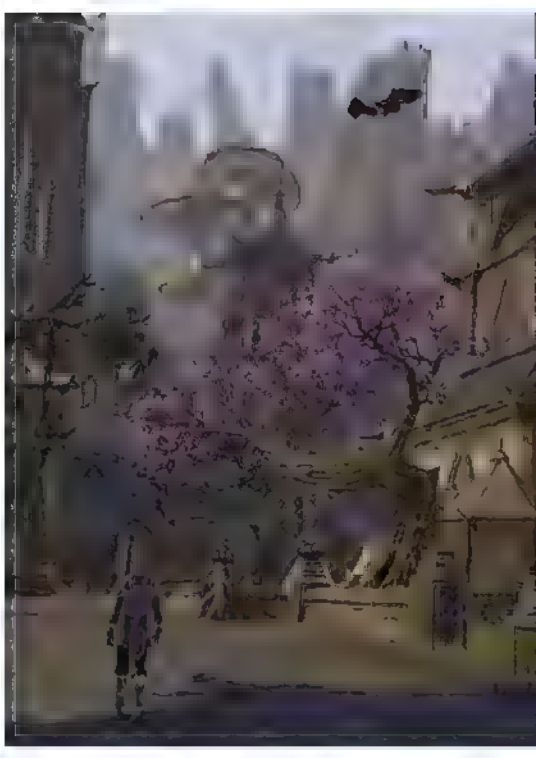
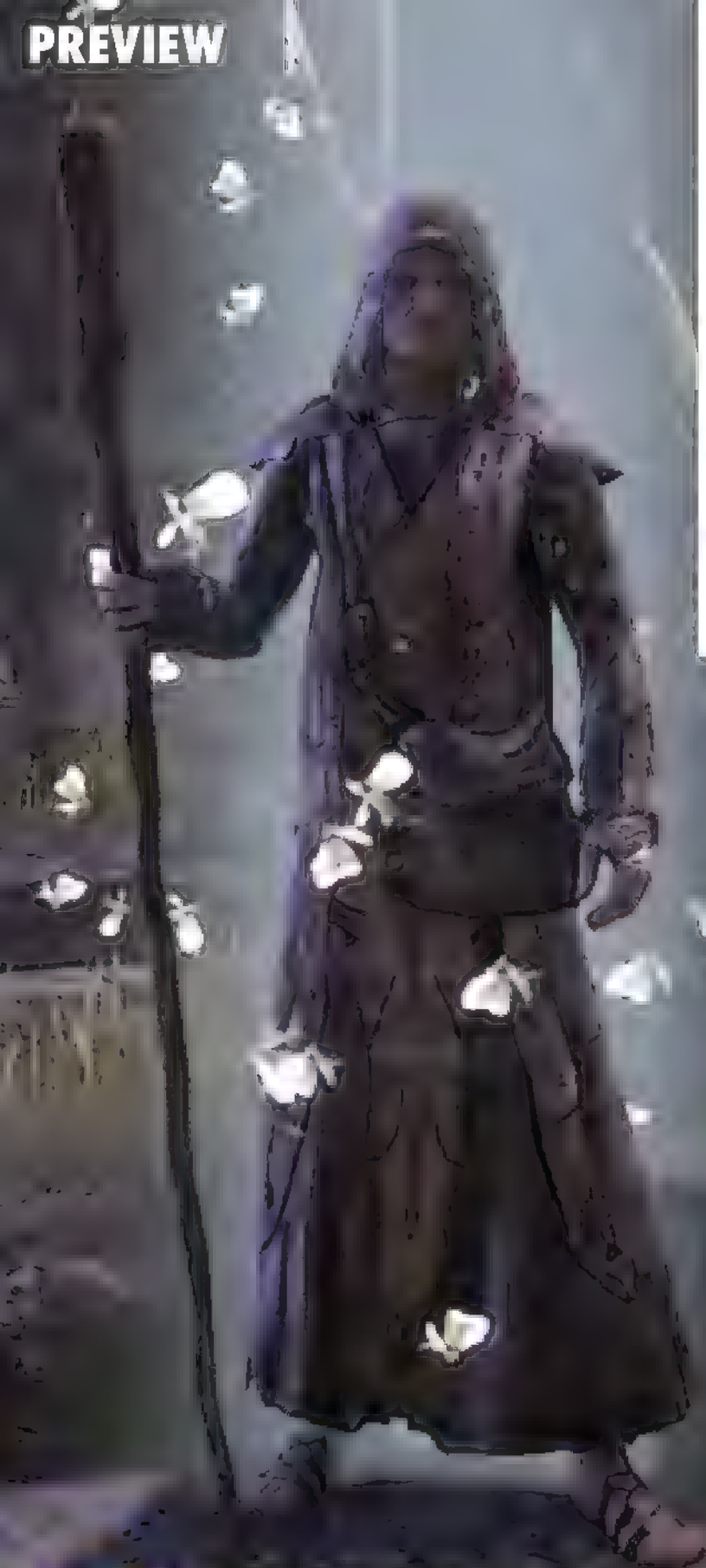
escape from a prison controlled by *TESO's* demon antagonist Molaġ Bol, located in the planes of oblivion – a hell dimension essentially.

The whole prison complex was a torture chamber of sorts, imprisoning members of various races for all eternity for a

mysterious reason. This area was populated by familiar-sounding NPC helpers like the know-it-all mystic Preacher, voiced by Michael Gambon (think *Dumbledore 2.0*) and Lyris Titanborn (voiced by Jennifer 'FemShep' Hale) who manages to sacrifice herself for the greater good within ten minutes of getting introduced.

In terms of openings it's every bit as strong as *Skyrim's* or *Oblivion's* but it goes on for just a tad too long as it introduces this series well established 'crouch to move silently' stealth system and the tried-and-tested 'go here and talk to this guy to initiate quest' formula – something every player of either an MMORPG or an Elder Scrolls game will be more than aware of at this point.

After going through yet another starter area dubbed Bleakrock Isle (see *FirstLook: Issue 9* for a preview of that area) and

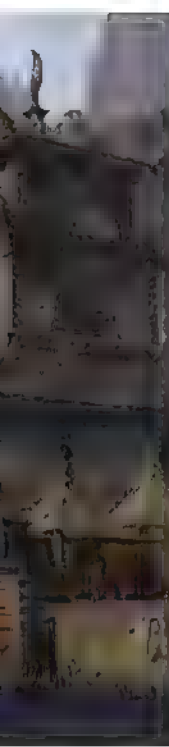


suffering through more entry level quests, involving fantasy melodrama with the occasionally bout of silliness, we finally seized an opportunity to venture onto the Tamriel landmass proper. Our argonian was placed in the familiar surrounds of Morrowind boasting jellyfish-like netch, magnificent castles, angry dark elves and an unmistakable alien grey tinge to everything in the world.

## PLAYING TOGETHER

Choice of Alliance contributes to what area players start in so friends will have to co-ordinate during character creation to ensure they don't maroon themselves from each other needlessly during the early levels, but other than that *TESO* is ripe for players to play together. There isn't any kind of fenced-off instanced quest content as seen in *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, instead





Conversations use the exact same system as *Skyrim*, allowing players to talk about various subjects if the game offers them

players can team up to complete everything once they exit the starter areas. We did notice a lot of phasing in areas though, with certain quests changing NPC placement and atmospheres massively. Our character fought off not one but two invasion events from nefarious forces – one

*“Understandably we chose the former, which inevitably doomed the inhabitants of the latter.”*

of which involved the choice of either protecting a defenseless port town or a heavily fortified castle. Understandably we chose the former, which inevitably doomed the inhabitants of the latter.

The next time we ventured into the castle, our character was met with dozens of dead vendors, quest givers and animals, while our accompanying friend witnessed a fully functional settlement unaware of the carnage we were witnessing alongside them. These phased moments, while fracturing and occasionally funny, do create a feeling that the player is changing the world around them which certainly makes an impact.

Combat too is worthy of praise as players can essentially drive their character down any progression path they wish while levelling and are able to switch between sword, shield, bow, mace, dagger and staff at will. Interestingly players also can unlock skills for weapons merely by using them – regardless of what their class/race specifies. This kind of freeform skill advancement



There are only 6 hot bar skill slots, but players can swap out the skills at any time between bouts of combat.



Mounts cost around 18,000 gold coins and during our level 1-10 exploits we only accumulated about 8,000

is welcome, and allows players to try out various combat roles before they find one they like.

There are still skills which are only specific to certain races and classes, but we noticed a lot of scope to experiment with one given character. In other MMORPGs that kind of chopping and changing of combat roles usually involves switching to an alternate character, but that thankfully isn't the case here. There's also no need to visit a vendor to level or earn new skills, which is a plus, and you can swap skills in and out of your task bar as long as you aren't involved in combat.

So while *TESO* is a game that has a number of strengths, there's also a fair amount of weaknesses, which a lot of times are caused simply by the expectations



[illegible]

The environment for example doesn't feel as ripe for player interaction as *Skyrim*, with less items to manipulate/pick-up and most egregiously of all the overall quality of quest writing, which despite boasting top tier voice talent, sometimes feels abt

to the player to ponder.

Judging any MMORPG on its first ten levels alone is folly to a certain extent and *TESO* certainly has enough about it to challenge the likes of *Wildstar*, *Guild Wars 2*, *World of Warcraft* and other MMORPGs for supremacy, but on the RPG front it doesn't quite have enough about it, to be the new *Elder Scrolls* experience everyone wants.

This previously sandbox-only franchise has been fenced in a little bit and a small amount of its magic has been lost as a result, at least in the early levels. Expect to see more coverage documenting our time with *The Elder Scrolls Online* in the issues ahead. ■

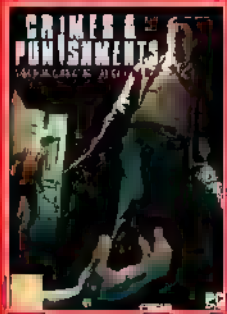
phoned in. All the primary quests where players talk with Prophet and learn more about Molag Bol's ascension to power prove fascinating, but many of the other quests feel flat, despite how many tough moral choices are offered.

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PREVIEW

# SHERLOCK HOLMES: CRIMES & PUNISHMENTS

DEVELOPED



PUB

DEV  
LAST GAME

PLATFORMS

ETA

## *Draw your own conclusions*

**W**hile watching a presentation for *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* we can't help but picture a fat, cigar-chomping executive telling his underlings to go out there and find a series which capitalises on the latest trend to capture the public zeitgeist. Something involving Sherlock Holmes, associated with a certain BBC TV series in source material alone, would certainly come under that heading but any assumptions that developer Frogwares are new to the adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective would be misguided to say the least.

This is actually the fifth Sherlock game to come from the Ukrainian studio, and while the series was new to us, we were rather intrigued by what we saw.

According to Frogwares, *Crimes & Punishments* is shaping up to be

the most polished entry in the series to date, with a case structure very similar to that of *LA Noire* with the occasional bouts of weirdness, frivolity and bullying between Holmes and his long-suffering assistant Watson as they attempt to solve seven different cases in Victorian London.

Powered by Unreal 3, gameplay ranges from surveying crime scenes, taking witness statements, making strange inhuman leaps of deductive reasoning and the occasionally quick-time event giving players something to do during inevitable action sequences, such as Holmes chasing after a suspect or testing Watson's fortitude for survival in a bizarre blindfolded shooter experiment.

All these tropes have been seen before in other Sherlock-starring media, but where Frogwares' is different is that it allows players to







*"Any assumptions that developer Frogwares are new to the adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective would be misguided to say the least"*

## PREVIEW

Crime scenes need to be studied meticulously to ensure clues aren't missed

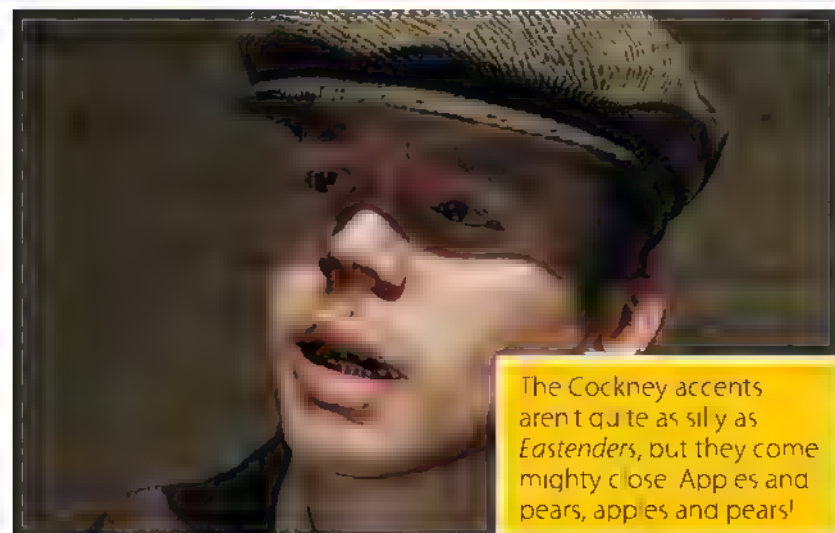


make mistakes and come to the wrong conclusions if they aren't paying attention. For instance, if you don't interview witnesses correctly or overlook a certain piece of information in a crime scene, the game doesn't clumsily insert said artefact or info later on. Instead players just have to hobble on and hope that something else lands in their lap before the inevitable moment arises in a case when they

have to either absolve or accuse any of the suspects they've unearthed. It's hard to believe that scope of player choice, and potential failure, is accommodated in cases which appear quite linear, but witnessing one case in action made the structure seem more practical.

In the murder of Peter Cairns case, players begin their investigation with a cutscene telling Holmes to get down to a specific address to appraise a murder scene. Before Holmes leaves he goes to his cupboard, chooses a disguise – a funny nose here, some suspect facial hair there – and then takes a coach ride with Watson down to the murder scene.

On arrival he's greeted by a witness who discovered the body in a grotesquely bloodied scene of the aforementioned ship captain being impaled on a wall, via a whaling harpoon. Gauging the scene involves hovering the cursor over all and any items adventure game-style, and also



The Cockney accents aren't quite as silly as *Eastenders*, but they come mighty close. Apples and pears, apples and pears!



Refreshingly, Sherlock can choose to condemn or absolve killers if he believes their crime involves extenuating circumstances, like self defence



activating something Frogwares calls Holmes Vision, in which the entire scene is covered in a bluish hue contrasted with neon yellow auras to indicate areas of interest. These yellow points range from marks on the floor to rectangular dust-free areas on a shelf indicating a missing chest, case or whatever, and usually indicate a chance to harvest additional info.

To some this kind of pixel hunting

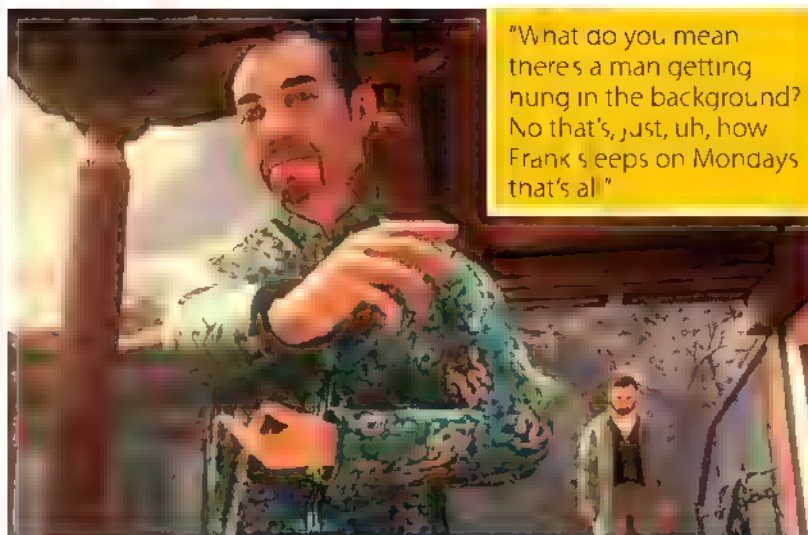
there was the chance to interview a clearly shaken female witness and before Sherlock started chatting he again activated his Sherlock Vision (yes, it's really called that) to pinpoint areas of interest on the witness – e.g. clothes, body language, etc. Despite Sherlock's inner monologue being voiced to the player during these moments, it all felt very schlocky and creates a *Columbo* meets *Murder She Wrote* kind of vibe.

During cases players are free to wander around different scenes either in first- or third-person and talk to whomever they wish, but in order to continue the case, certain

***"It's all very schlocky and creates a Columbo meets Murder She Wrote kind of vibe"***

may sound tedious, but the likes of *LA Noire* and even Capcom's esteemed *Phoenix Wright* series have shown that this kind of investigative gameplay can be exciting and should harbour a sense of the player feeling empowered as he or she is figuring things out in an organic manner – or at least it should feel that way, we didn't get to play the game ourselves.

Once exiting the bloodied room,



"What do you mean there's a man getting hung in the background? No that's, just, uh, how Frank sleeps on Mondays that's all"

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a hand holding a silver revolver. The hand is positioned in the upper right, with the thumb resting on the trigger guard. The revolver is pointed downwards and slightly to the left. The background is a dark, textured brick wall. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the hand and the gun, and deep shadows elsewhere.

**PREVIEW**

*"Handily, a note of every word muttered to Holmes is written in his journal for future reference"*

**FirstLook** | Preview





# HOW TO BE A GOOD SHERLOCK

deductions need to be made. Occasionally action moments do kick in and failing these can lead to a suspect escaping, creating black holes in a case.

Handily, a note of every word muttered to Holmes is written in his journal for future reference, and there's the ability to manipulate evidence and make causal links between testimony and suspects in a special menu which looks and functions like the inside of a cerebral cortex, with electrical nodes wrapping together to form bonds whenever two items/subjects are correctly linked.

There's still the big question of what happens if the player is just bad at the game and manages to repeatedly miss key clues, and when we asked a representative from the studio about this, they explained that this challenge is a key part of the game's appeal – allowing players to discover if they are a good Sherlock

Holmes, or a bad one. In an industry obsessed with accessibility and dumbing down, that kind of trial-by-fire approach is endearing.

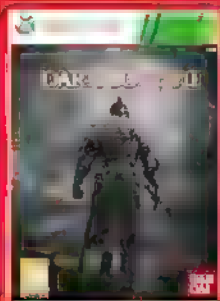
Our heads still spin when we think about the writing skills necessary to offer this kind of player choice, but if Frogwares manages to pull it off, *Crimes & Punishments* might be the first entry in this series to properly penetrate the mainstream. Such an approach requires a plot map more complicated than the London Underground and a big production budget to give all those story branches enough attention, but we'll leave that to smarter men and women. The world is finally ready for a proper Sherlock Holmes game, and here's hoping this one fits the bill. ■

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## DARK SOULS II

PREVIEW



PUB: NAMCO BANDAI  
DEV: BANDAI NAMCO GAMES  
LAST GAME: DARK SOULS I  
VERDICT: DAY  
PLATFORM: PS3, XBOX 360, PC  
ETA: Q4 2014

## TWITTER



**@DarkSoulsGame**  
Dark Souls II PC version  
announcement coming. @pcgamer  
flammarion



**@LucyJamesGamer**  
Dark Souls II PC version  
announcement coming. @pcgamer  
flammarion



**@Dtdid**  
Dark Souls II DLC will depend  
on fan feedback <http://dtdid.com>  
KJ1FG4MZV



**@Kotaku**  
Dark Souls II PC version, fixed  
up and looking fine: <http://bit.ly/1k2p9w>

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

## No failure until surrender

This might be an odd way to start a preview, but admitting you have a problem is the first step I'm told. *Dark Souls* is banned from my household. There's no other way to put it. In the words of my wife and I quote... "Would you," meaning me, "stop playing that ugly dungeon game!"

"Why?" I protest. "Because you become a right a\*\*\*hole when you play that game!" Now at that moment I could've calmly and rationally addressed such a wild accusation, but I had to agree with my usually quite pleasant spouse, whose outburst occurred only moments after I split an Xbox controller into multiple plastic bits after being flung yet again off a cliff by a devilishly placed Giant Stone Knight. Since that epic morning, which otherwise ruined a rather pleasant Sunday in addition to endangering my Facebook relationship status, I haven't touched *Dark Souls*, leaving my weak yet steadfast shortbow-enhanced Hunter in the dark cave not unlike the one from whence he came.

The reason I bring this up is this, playing *Dark Souls II* for the first time at a recent press event felt a little too good. Sure I died a dozen times, got lost even more times and came across what I can only describe as an angrier and plumper version of Shrek armed with nothing but his fists and an extremely wide bum, but playing From Software's sequel felt much like coming home again. That timing of when to roll away, when to block and when to attack came back to me slowly but surely. In addition to how long it takes to take a sip of health via Estus Flasks, or some new healing items known as Lifesoul gems – of which our freshly spawned lady knight somehow had 10 of. The campaign started with a cinematic revealing our character's undead status, punctuated by a creepy

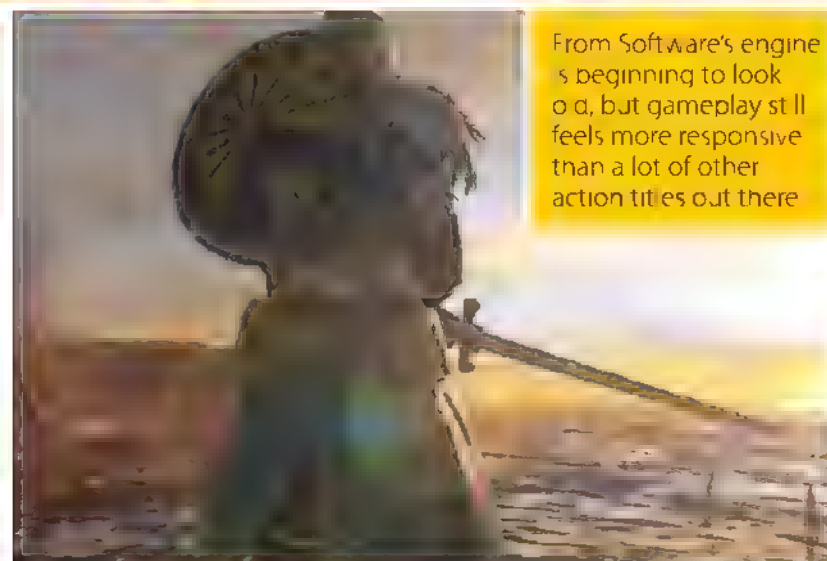




"Moments after I split an Xbox controller into multiple plastic after being yet again flung off of a cliff by a devilishly placed Giant Stone Knight"



Attack and block timing remains just as important as before, as does engaging managing multiple enemies at a time effectively



From Software's engine is beginning to look odd, but gameplay still feels more responsive than a lot of other action titles out there


old lady asking if our character was "a monarch or a pawn of fate"

The basic premise hasn't changed from the last game essentially - you're a guy or gal in a strange fantasy land still beset by bizarre and terrifying fantasy monsters. Explore the landscape and find out if you can survive. Oh, and while you're at it, pick up some milk and a few vanquished souls along the way.

As I struggled forward it became clear that the hard edges of this franchise haven't been sanded down for this sequel one iota, at least from what I could see. There is a new agile Explorer class to compliment the existing Soldier, Warrior and Temple Knight ones, and the character creator still offers a staggering number of sliders to customise your soon-to-be-tormented member of the undead. The inventory system remains mostly unchanged, with four rings now able to be equipped rather than two, and players can still equip found items easily without having to plunge into the menus.

The one inclusion which did





See we told you she was creepy


knock me for six a little was the introduction of voice chat. Now two friends still can't necessarily tackle *Dark Souls II* together, due to the randomised matchmaking system, and they still need a White Sign Soapstone to summon others into their world, but two buddies can increase their chance of being placed together by pledging allegiance to the same god – there are 10 – in-game.

Now this may sound obtruse, but firstly that's kind of the *Dark Souls* way, and secondly a key part of this experience is exploring for yourself and heeding the vague warnings scribbled on the floor, belying dangers, hints, taunts or lies about the area ahead. This series has a unique form of multiplayer where the community both hinders and helps itself to get ahead by scrawling messages in the environment. The inclusion of multiplayer chat support might hinder that, but it's only an option for some players, and of course it can be switched off if an individual chooses. Additionally,

anyone who comes into your game will be ranked on if they help or harm your progression. If they are naughty they are flagged by the matchmaking system and from that moment on can only join games containing similarly feedback-damned players.

From a personal standpoint, voice chat could save my *Dark Souls* habit and encourage my *Gears of War*-loving wife to tackle the carnage together, but the randomised nature of matchmaking kills that dream. At the very least, I'll just have to hope that we get lucky and not get matched up with any screaming ten year olds.

My *Dark Souls II* career might be over before it begins, but that doesn't mean I'm any less tempted to explore From Software's sequel.

There's no doubt in my mind that more people need to explore this innovative and unique series. 

**Michael Affi**



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## WARGAME RED DRAGON

PREVIEW



PUB: FOCUS HOME  
INTERACTIVE  
DEV: EUGEN SYSTEMS  
LAST GAME: WARLAND AIR  
LAND BATTLE  
PLATFORM: PC  
TBA: Q2 2014

## TWITTER



@WargameRTS  
Happy Games NE  
you! May all your future battles  
be victories!  
#WargameRedDragon



@PuzzlesandSocks  
I should've known getting a game  
called "Wargame" was a recipe for  
not feeling the need to sleep!  
#notreadyforthisadulthoodsh\*t



@LAKIN\_11  
Gotta love this pub in #war-  
game airland battle. He has like  
1000s of units and a lot of them  
squad...



@Weomadande  
It's 12 bucks. It's like Ground  
Control. Get on it and join us  
incompetents in MP Wargame  
Airland Battle on Steam!

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

## Year of the Frigate

**R**TS games are back baby! With recent releases like *Total War: Rome II*, *Company of Heroes II*, and *Europa Universalis III* going multi-platinum it's clear that at least a million gamers out there are constantly on the look out for the next big strategy phenomenon. *Wargame Airland Battle* undoubtedly belongs with those heavy hitters, selling over 700,000 copies in just a few months via Steam, which proves not only that Eugen System's first series since the tragically ignored World War II RTS, *RUSE*, is rather good but also that there's a large audience out there hankering to blow their whistle with modern military hardware rather than historic.

*Wargame Red Dragon* pushes this grand strategy series even further towards the modern day, extending the previous game's 1975 Cold War setting up to 1995. That means more advanced tech to play with equating to over 350 new tanks, aircraft, APCs and for the first time naval vessels – spread over the existing nations and five new ones: China, North Korea, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

These distinct, Eastern selections give the game more of a worldwide flavour and boosts the unit choice to a staggering 1300! We were shown an array of different realistic looking vehicles all of which had their own short descriptive bios and identifiers detailing their battlefield role, weaknesses and strengths.

Understandably forming your own deck of units to take into battle is still a large part of formulating an effective strategy in this release, as ever governed by a pesky unit cap, but Eugen has thankfully added more means to categorise and sort unit choices. So, for example, if you just want British units you can easily select that or if you want a specific unit, say a Challenger II tank, you can type the first few letters belonging to that behemoth in the search bar to find your armament.





"These distinct, Eastern selections give the game more of a worldwide flavour and boosts the unit choice to a staggering 1,300!"



Players can now delegate battle roles to players in 10 versus 10 multiplayer skirmishes, by allocating specific decks to play with




of choice. Interestingly there are four (yes four!) different sorts of Challenger tank to choose from, so the roster does involve some repetition, but each boasts slightly different weapon loadouts and characteristics.

If you aren't interested in those what-if discussions of which nation has the best tank, say France versus Britain, and finding out by pitting them against one another on the battlefield then Eugen's commitment to reality may come across as superfluous, but harbouring this kind of detail is clearly a passion for them and we commend them for it. Even if the battle engine isn't your thing, the french developer has produced a pretty impressive interactive database for ageing military hardware.

Deckbuilding and sharing also seems much easier, with players able to share their deck online via an automatically generated code which can just be copied and





The Iriszoom Engine still allows players to either zoom out or zoom in to marshal their forces in battle.

pasted in text format. Players can also store their favourite decks in the cloud.

As ever, the Iriszoom Engine still allows players to seamlessly transition between a lofty *Total War*-esque campaign map to zooming in to see a single vehicle or battalion carrying out orders. As a result, battles can feel a bit detached with little of the human drama of war communicated to the player, but then this series has never been about characterising the horror of war, just its strategic relevance.

Eugen are essentially covering the fantasy of war, albeit with realism in mind, and that's shown in the handful of new dynamic campaigns; one involving Britain protecting Hong Kong from Chinese invasion prior to independence and the Korean War. We would've thought that the Falklands War would've also been worth putting in here, especially with the introduction of new naval battles, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Campaigns

are still dynamic, but now there are supporting AI characters, essentially talking portraits, who communicate information about how the battle is going and what the enemy might do next.

Naval combat is, as in real life, all about ranged missile-based combat with strength in numbers the only sure-fire way to get a missile through another fleet's countermeasures, be they interceptor missiles or the intimidating gatling gun, but battles still look clean and cool.

*Red Dragon* expands the Wargame series in some really interesting directions and after conquering land and air warfare, naval combat was always going to be next on the list. Our minds are still swimming in the permeations of having all these tanks, ships, APCs, and more at our disposal and we have no doubt that this sleeper hit franchise will win even more fans with this sequel. ■



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FEATURE

# WHY NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO RETURN TO...

# GUILD WARS



## Pondering the climax of ArenaNet's Living Story: Season One



Mike Zadorojny is Lead Designer on *Guild Wars 2* at ArenaNet, and has worked on the game since its earliest inception. He could tell you everything he knows, but then he'd have to kill you.

**B**ig things are about to hit the land of Tyria, but don't take our word for it. Heed the advice of *Guild Wars 2*'s Lead Designer Mike Zadorojny, who recently spoke with us about the big plans ArenaNet have for the conclusion of the *Living Story: Season One*.

"Basically this entire time we've been doing this massive story, with lots of undertones and hidden plots throughout this entire year, and over the next four releases we're tying all that together," he declared while talking us through the forthcoming updates in some detail.

"We're doing it in an epic fashion with some major revelations and

some things that'll change the face of Tyria as we know it."

*Guild Wars 2*'s *Living Story* strategy is summed up easiest as an attempt to keep the story of Tyria moving post-launch, with the introduction of one-off events and permanent inclusions which expand the gameworld and introduce new characters while evolving existing ones. This strategy began in January 2012 with the *Flame and Frost Legion: Prelude* update, and since then ArenaNet has been adding more and more content to *Guild Wars 2* for free at an increased frequency (as often as every two weeks), with recurring antagonist Scarlet Briar at the centre





# RS

with 'Mr Z'

of everything. Each new update extended an elaborate and at times confusing tapestry of allegiances and enemy factions, ranging from airship-bound Aetherblade Pirates to deranged Nightmare Court, all of whom were working on behalf of Ms Briar towards a mysterious yet seemingly grand goal.

Such a steady stream of worthwhile content had rarely been attempted in an MMO before, especially one that didn't require players to pay a subscription fee, and while later updates like *Nightmare Tower* energised the community with a wealth of new content to explore, earlier updates like *Last Stand at*

"Some things will change the face of Tyria as we know it"

Scarlet's forces have even penetrated the World vs World realm—an area that was formerly only committed to PvP



Southsun Cove fell flat with bugs marring an otherwise lacklustre story.

Crucially, ArenaNet has been learning from their mistakes and with each update are getting better and better at adding features fans care about and extending the story in an entertaining, more detailed, fashion. Outside of the festival events, the most recent update, *Origins of Madness*, has been the best yet and finally padded out Scarlet's character, which has been an issue ever since the evil mastermind was first mentioned in the game's fiction.

Oddly it was outside of *Guild Wars 2*, where players actually got to learn of Scarlet's motivations and back story, via a selection of short stories on the game's official website. This reliance on supplemental material to fully grasp the *Living Story* is something fans have complained about for a long time, and it seems

ArenaNet has finally listened to this feedback, as starting with the *Origins of Madness* update, they finally allowed those brilliant short story details to bleed into the actual game.

*"There is a big point here, in terms of the battle between Scarlet's free will versus this creature's and you'll see her transformation"*

Bundled in the recent patch (which is now two updates old) was not only an opportunity to battle Scarlet's minions, including a giant robot lady marionette, but also an opportunity to visit Scarlet's secret underground lair and take a peek into her psyche via previously locked away journal



Scarlet Briar has been at the centre of most of the *Living Story* content and her story has to come to some kind of conclusion in the updates ahead



pages.

"This is the first time players get to see a little bit of the history behind Scarlet, and it tells the backstory of how she looked into the Eternal Alchemy and saw something looking back at her," Mike explained in a typically excited fashion.

"This malevolent being was so powerful that it started taking over her mind and giving her suggestions in terms of what she should be doing. There is a big point here, in terms of the battle between Scarlet's free will versus this creature's, and you'll see her transformation."

Previously, Scarlet Briar has been viewed as a kind of Joker-esque character, a mysterious antagonist who twists things behind the scenes for no reason more than her own personal amusement, but recent patches has changed that from an in-game perspective, echoing the consistently entertaining short stories which still remain buried in

## LIVING STORY STATS

- Every update for Guild Wars 2 has been free for all players.
- ArenaNet refuse to rule out the potential of traditional paid-for expansion releases in the future.
- Since May 2013, ArenaNet has released a new update for Guild Wars 2 every two weeks.
- There have been 26 updates, at time of writing, since launch including festivals and events.
- Much of the new content added to Tyria has been taken away within a month of its release.
- ArenaNet has committed to releasing more permanent content, in response to feedback from fans.

A handful of new bosses have arrived in Tyria post launch and most of them have offered massive encounters which involve dozens and dozens of players to take down. ArenaNet seem to be moving away from instanced areas to more public events in communicating their *Living Story*.



ArenaNet's news archive. That's enough about the past though, what about the game's future?

What 'malevolent being' is Mr Z referring to? This is the question that *Guild Wars* fans have been scratching their heads over for the past year, with Scarlet's behaviour proving less erratic yet still unpredictable. The exciting thing is that over the next set of updates all these questions will be answered and more, as ArenaNet set up what will be a grander and more personal plot for *Living Story: Season 2*.

"A lot of the focus of these final releases will be putting the player character at the centre of the story again. For the personal story it was all about the player's journey, and during the last year we've been telling the story of the world. Now we want to get back to why the player matters in the story," Mike again foretold, with the promise that Tyria won't be the

same after this current season finally wraps up.

"Nothing is sacred, everything can be destroyed," he revealed in a rather foreboding manner.

The point that we're making is this: *Guild Wars 2's Living Story* is finally

*"The focus of these final releases will be putting the player character at the centre of the story again"*

beginning to pay off, and over the next releases players (be they returning or long term) will get to see everything that ArenaNet has been working up to for the past year without the need to plunk down any extra cash. Many MMO developers would either charge a subscription



ArenaNet has managed to incorporate the traditional staple of Christmas, Halloween and the now traditional Super Adventure Box events into *Guild Wars 2*'s bi-monthly update strategy and that, we presume, will continue into this year as well.



fee or force the player to snap up an expansion in order to enjoy this extra content, but instead ArenaNet are giving it away for free in the hope that they'll hook you into their game for the long term.

Inevitably the trade off for this kind of event-driven update cycle is that the really meaningful story content won't stick around for long, but then isn't that what the term Living World is all about? Giving players an opportunity to explore meaningful moments that are finite and unrepeatable, offering them ownership of said moments, empowering them to tell their friends 'I was there way back when.' You know, like you would in the real world when something momentous happens to you!

Well, something momentous is happening and is about to happen in Tyria, and if you care about the MMO genre or gaming in general, you owe it to yourself to be part of it. ■

## WHAT'S TO COME?

The first season of the *Living Story* will conclude this spring in four updates. The first two, *Origins of Madness* and *Edge of the Mists*, have already gone live with another set to hit servers a few days after this issue of *FirstLook* is released, leaving just one more to wrap things up. No characters or areas of Tyria are safe from the influence of Scarlet, and ArenaNet is promising that the continent won't be the same after the first season concludes. After that final story-centric update nits, there will be another gameplay-centric update which adds a bunch of new quality of life and community centric features the developer has been holding back and working so idly on for the past few months – tinkering and polishing them up.



# WHY ESGN WILL TO THE N

Say hello to the eSports Global Network, a new way to ke

Where to find  
ESGN content?

esgntv

**Rankings:** ESGN.com  
**YouTube:** youtube.com/user/esgn  
**Twitch:** www.twitch.tv/esgntv/profile  
**Twitter:** @ESGN\_TV

Competitive gaming is a massive culture, which is only getting bigger and better every single year. This is a fact that no user of Twitch or payer of *DOTA 2*, *StarCraft II* or *Counterstrike: Global Offensive* would deny. Yet despite near-constant growth in popularity, one major stumbling block for eSports still remains, and that's a means to track competitor performance across different tournaments around the globe.

Last month one such endeavour finally went live, and the eSports Global Network's massive fan-accessible database was a instant hit,

communicating to users not only who is the best athlete or team on the planet when it comes to a certain game, but also who are the emerging stars rising through the ranks.

At the end of 2013 we spoke with the business leader behind this new initiative, which is all part of ESGN TV, a new network with the grand goal of professionalising and evangelising competitive digital sport to the masses.

"Just as in other sport, in eSports it's the players and the stories which fans really care about. Telling the stories behind the development of a player, and giving fans the opportunity to track his or her record

The standings will become more important as more eSports events are held around the globe

**STANDINGS**

Rank	Team	Score
2	All anc	2565
3	Natus Vincere	2549
4	CG Gaming	2498
5	Team Empire	2441
6	Invictus Gaming	2428
7	Sigma.int	2344
8	vici Gaming	2341
9	...	...

**CALENDAR**  
February 2014



Korea is still the centre of the world when it comes to eSports, and unsurprisingly is the location of a lot of the Daily News Show content



# TAKE ESPORTS EXT LEVEL

ep track and watch the best digital athletes on the planet

is really important," Johan Lee, CEO of Clauf (the Korean firm that's behind ESGN) explained.

"In eSports right now, since the organisers just work for themselves, there are many one-off events which have no connection to any other event. You watch them, there's a winner and then the broadcast ends. We believe that through co-operation with our partners we can connect those performances, and through our homepage we want to give fans the opportunity to see how a player has performed over time. We will achieve that with two things: a separate points system and the ELO system ➤

Johan Lee, and his company Clauf, are committed to the ESGN concept for the long term.



## ESGN's Daily News Show

In addition to a rather fancy database, ESGN TV also holds a daily 15-minute wrap-up show dedicated to covering all the big eSports news of the day. This includes interviews with athletes, news from tournament organisers and reports from developers and publishers of the big eSports games. It's easy to see why the producers of ESGN TV decided they needed this kind of content, as it has the twofold benefit of legitimising and bolstering their admittedly thin schedule of programming, but it's a classic example of giving too much coverage to too little content.

eSports is growing year on year, but it has yet to reach the critical mass which necessitates daily news reporting. More programming like *Fight Night* or documentaries about how to make it as an eSport professional would be preferable to this *Daily News* show, which always seems bloated with needless padding.





Not every publisher has the r game emblazoned with watermarks, and these paranoid touches should go away as ESGN gains more status

## Fight Night

Accessibility is a big problem for eSports. If you're interested in the competitive scene of *League of Legends*, *Call of Duty*, *Street Fighter* or *StarCraft*, the likelihood is that you've played and enjoyed those games in the past. ESGN's *Fight Night* series actively tries to bat against that assumption, by not only showing bouts between the best eSports athletes in the world, but also the nuts and bolts of what makes their strategies superior and how their competitive game of choice works. The series began with Blizzard's digital card-game *Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft* in January and in February the series is moved on to emulating the frenetic action of *Street Fighter*. eSports by their design don't have the simplicity of other sports such as Football, Basketball or even Cricket, so educating audiences in some ways is just as important as entertaining them.



(the rating system used in *League of Legends*, which tracks wins versus losses), which includes all tournaments that happen around the world, as long as they meet a certain standard."

All competitions associated with the ESGN - ESL (Electronic Sports League), GOM eXP and Gamefy across Asia and Europe are currently tracked in this database, with North American partners due to join soon. At the time of writing, the ranking system only applies to *StarCraft II*, *Dota 2* and *League of Legends* tournaments, but we were assured that there are plans to extend the roster to include games such as *Street Fighter IV*, *FIFA*, *Call of Duty*, *Battlefield*, *ShootMania* and more in the months ahead.

### TIME FOR A SHOW

The second part of ESGN's grand plan to revolutionise eSports is their dedicated Twitch and YouTube channel, ESGN TV. If you've witnessed any of their early programming then you'll know that this new eSports voice, while well-financed, is still





Games like *Street Fighter IV* are an easy fit for online broadcasts, but we're hoping ESGN expands to cover more overlooked competitive scenes like *iRacing*

finding its feet with programming which has all the touches of top tier sports entertainment yet still feels amateurish at times in terms of tone, script quality and basic equipment.

At the moment the aforementioned database is the most exciting aspect of the project, but that'll change as more programming is added to the

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***"A pan-continental service which seeks to unite a culture which, in the West at least, remains in the shadows"***

---

online channel. Dan 'Frodan' Chou works as a good host and the daily news slots for all eSports news is a lofty, albeit slightly unnecessary, feature for eSports which at the moment is still in its adolescence.

Programming like *Fight Night* on the other hand helps to give eSports athletes more of a real face than their digital facades would suggest, and we were told that ESGN's programming

would stay away from perpetrating some of the more unwelcome hallmarks of eSports culture, like the outright sexism towards female athletes and offensive language. Their remit isn't necessarily to clean up eSports by functioning as a governing body, but their umbrella coverage of various tournaments from different organisers should encourage things to get more professional.

We have high hopes for the ESGN, if only because something like this has never really been attempted before – a pan-continental service which seeks to unite a culture which in the West at least, remains in the shadows.

ESGN TV isn't everything it could be quite yet, with programming that has yet to capture mainstream attention. Still, Clauf are committed to it for the long-term and here's hoping they produce more original programming that gets to grips with the kind of commitment it takes to earn money from professional gaming. 2014 is set to be the biggest year for eSports yet, and if early signs are any indication, ESGN should be right at the centre of it. ■

# DLC & UGC Round-Up

## BioShock Infinite: Burial at Sea 2

DLC

PUB: 2K Games  
DEV: Irrational Games  
TBA: March

**O**f all the DLC we played last year, *BioShock Infinite: Burial at Sea Episode 1* stayed with us the longest. We are going to spoil a few things about that episode now, so if you don't want to know anything or plan on playing the precursor to *Episode 2* (you really, really should) skip on. Booker's revisit to Rapture surprised us at every turn, not only in how clearly annoyed Elizabeth was throughout the whole thing, but also just how dark Rapture society was even before all hell broke loose on New Year's Eve, 1958.

*Episode 2* shifts up that formula even more with around six hours' worth of content and involves the player, for the first time, controlling Elizabeth directly. Things are about to get even messier in Rapture. ■



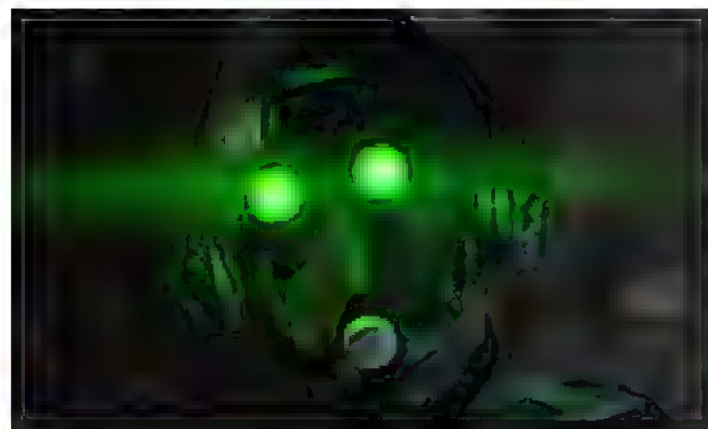
## Payday 2: Gauge Weapon Pack #2

DLC

PUB: 505 Games  
DEV: Overkill Software  
OUT NOW

**O**h god, it's a cloaker! That word is enough to strike fear in anyone who played *Payday* extensively, and like the

sadistic little studio that they are, Overkill has added this blighter back into *Payday 2* for free. This guy can sneak up on a team, unleash his silenced SMG to quickly lessen health or, even worse, knock a team member out in one single hit. Good job the developer released a new premium weapons pack to deal with this blighter, but honestly, all the new masks, assault rifles, knives and elaborate paint schemes in the world aren't going to help you if you happen to come across this Sam Fisher-a-like enemy class unprepared. ■





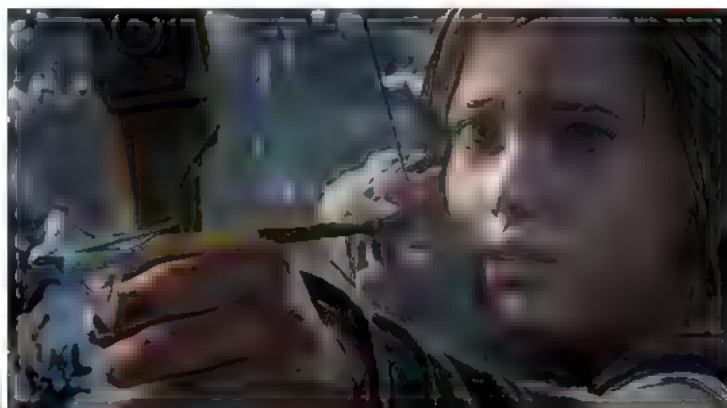
# The Last of Us: Left Behind



PUB: Sony  
DEV: Naughty Dog  
ETA: 14th Feb

**T**he *Last of Us* won a truckload of awards last year and that was purely down to the survival game's epic single-player campaign. Thankfully that iconic new IP is about to get extended via a new single-player mini-campaign titled *Left Behind*. For the benefit of the uninitiated, *Left Behind* is a prequel which focuses on Ellie's life before she met Joel, when she resided in a military boarding school located in Boston's dilapidated quarantine zone. There she meets a friend named Riley, who has managed to get

herself involved with a resistance group known as 'The Fireflies'. We're very intrigued to see how this prequel shakes out, and if it's a precursor to even more adventures in Naughty Dog's expertly crafted world. ■



# Super Sonic Generations



DEV: JETE  
FIND IT: ModDB  
OUT NOW

**A**lright, so full disclosure. This mod actually came out in February 2013 but seeing as we hadn't played *Sonic*

*Generations* before a recent Steam Sale poked its head out from under the online ether, it's flown under our radar. We're glad we did try it out though, as it actually enabled *Sonic Generations* to be much more fun than in its vanilla form. As the title suggests, this mod boosts all playable characters in SG, making their powered-up 'Super' forms default. This boost results in faster movement, better attacks and surprisingly harder gameplay. Essentially this mod makes this modern *Sonic* title feel more like the games of old. ■



WATCH US

# VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTH

## Where to Watch our Videos



- [youtube.com/user/TheAndyGriffiths](https://youtube.com/user/TheAndyGriffiths)
- [youtube.com/user/GamerZines](https://youtube.com/user/GamerZines)
- [youtube.com/user/GamerZinesUncut](https://youtube.com/user/GamerZinesUncut)

## Several Hours With **WILDSTAR**

**W**e have over eight hours worth of raw gameplay footage on our YouTube channel detailing everything Carbine Studios' debut MMORPG has to offer prior to level 15. We also have audio from a recent chat with *Wildstar's* Art Director Matt Mocarski. The adventures of our Mordesh Settler Trunkbutt shouldn't be missed!

## Tell us What You Want to See



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- [twitter.com/Gamerzines](https://twitter.com/Gamerzines)
- [facebook.com/GamerZines](https://facebook.com/GamerZines)

## **BROKEN AGE** The First 30 Mins

**A**ny adventure game made by former LucasArts legend Tim Schafer is undoubtedly worth a look and that's exactly what we do in this video with commentary from big *Psychonauts* fan-boy/man-child Andy Griffiths. Even his vast experience can't help him avoid getting stuck on one of the earliest puzzles in the game.



PUB: NCSoft  
DEV: CARBINE STUDIOS  
TBA: SPRING 2014



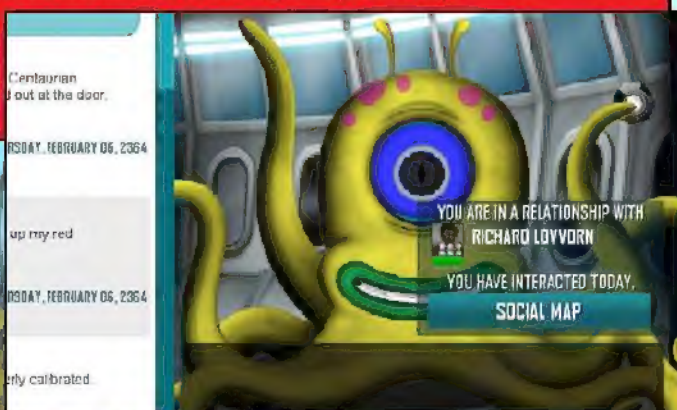
PUB: DOUBLE FINE  
PRODUCTIONS  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
OUT NOW



## Going Social with REDSHIRT

PUB: POSITECH  
DEV: THE TINIEST  
SHARK  
OUT NOW

**O**f all the indie games we played last year, *Redshirt* was undoubtedly the strangest. A sci-fi social network sim where players have to woo and befriend AI to progress up the corporate ladder may not sound like the most exciting thing in the world, but watching someone repeatedly fail at said wooing proves surprisingly entertaining. This video isn't for the faint of heart and may cause 'Facebook professionals' to cringe repeatedly.



## Pondering Early Access with NEXT CAR GAME

PUB: BUGBEAR  
DEV: IN-HOUSE  
TBA: 2014 (In  
Early Access)

**E**arly Access is a strange trend which allows gamers to 'buy into' unfinished games early and essentially guide their development. *Next Car Game* is the most recent high-profile release to go for this model, and in this video we weigh up whether this new trend is a good or bad thing for an industry which is notoriously unpredictable.





ISSUE 14

# NEXT MONTH



EVOLVE



THE ORDER: 1886

FirstLook | NextMonth



**COMING  
13TH  
MARCH**



# **WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER**

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